

MY FIRST WAR

*An Army Officer's Journal
For May 1940*

THROUGH BELGIUM TO
DUNKIRK

By
Captain Sir Basil Bartlett, Bt.

NEW YORK
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1941

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Set up and printed.

FIRST PRINTING.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AMERICAN BOOK-STRATFORD PRESS, INC., NEW YORK

MY FIRST WAR



THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK • BOSTON • CHICAGO • DALLAS
ATLANTA • SAN FRANCISCO

DEDICATED TO
C.S.M. C. D. BAIRD



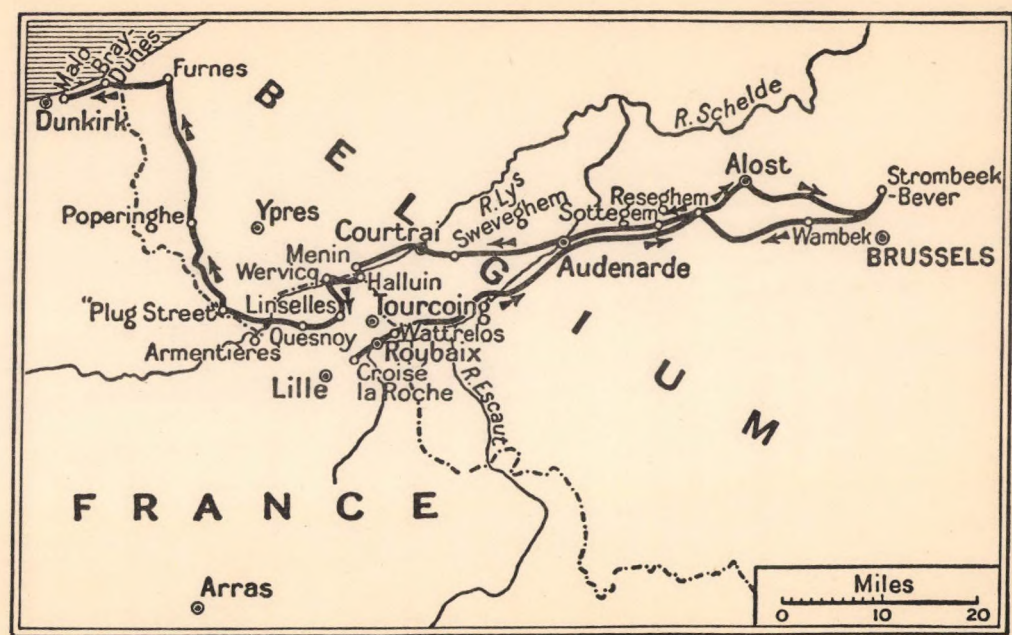
AUTHOR'S PREFACE

This little book does not pretend to be a history of the Flanders campaign. It is merely a collection of impressions and notes which I jotted down while on Active Service with the B.E.F. in France and Belgium during the memorable month of May, 1940. There is nothing authoritative about it.

When the balloon went up I was serving as a Field Security officer with a Regular Division. And it was my privilege to accompany that Division on its move into Belgium and right back again to Dunkirk. I didn't come much in contact with the actual fighting troops. My job was to thwart enemy attempts at espionage, sabotage and propaganda. And if this record gives from time to time a false impression of muddle it must be remembered that every suspicious character in the area—refugee, crook, lunatic, enemy agent—turned up sooner or later in my office.

The book is dedicated to my C.S.M. But it is really intended as a tribute to that extraordinary mixture of gaiety, ribaldry, piety, kindness and sheer stark courage: the British soldier.

B. B.



AUTHOR'S ROUTE

May 1st

I've been in this office for five months.¹ I'm beginning to wonder if I shall ever get out of it. The Division has collected so many possessions during the course of the winter that I doubt if it could move now even if it wanted to.

The view from my window is unexciting, but familiar. I've grown quite attached to it. There's a ploughed field in front of me which is miraculously beginning to turn green as the corn breaks through. Behind it is a wall plastered with advertisements. Away to the right is the race-course. It looks very forlorn. The March season has failed to open, although trainers drive trotting-horses hopefully round. I do the steeplechase course myself occasionally in the evenings, on foot, taking all the jumps except the water-jump, while the French A/A gunners jeer.

My office is an unfurnished flat. It was horribly bleak during the winter—in spite of intermittent central heating. The hot weather has improved things a lot.

We've done our best to make ourselves comfortable. We have a coffee-pot and saucepans and a gas-ring that works. And there's a bath. The big wash-basin in the bathroom is out of order. Corporal Russell blew it up just before Christmas in a misguided effort

¹ Croisé Laroche—just north of Lille.

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to clear the pipe with a time-fuse and a couple of gallons of petrol.

We are long past the Fortnum & Mason stage in housekeeping. I remember coming back once after a long night's patrol to find nothing in the office except tinned pheasant and a magnum of champagne. Now the baker and the milkman call.

Most of the flats in this building are inhabited. On the ground floor is the Army Post Office. Just below us is the cipher office, which is a soberer office than ours. It is guarded by a group of intelligent Warrant Officers who treat their cipher machines as though they were Shirley Temple or the B.B.C.

Next door live two charming sisters engaged in the oldest profession in the world. They were born in a Roubaix slum, but did so well for themselves that they now have a house in Le Touquet and a lot of expensive jewellery. They have a car and a poodle puppy and an old father who keeps house for them.

Above them is a woman with a string of noisy children who lends my N.C.O.s knives and forks and gives them cooking lessons.

Above her again there's an elderly couple with whom I once had a strange adventure. A German carrier-pigeon, on its way back to Heligoland, made a forced landing in their bedroom, and I had to go and catch it. I chased it all round the room, finally

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cornering it on top of a high wardrobe, while the elderly couple sat up in bed and watched me solemnly.

In the basement lives the concierge, a dynamic little woman with a loud laugh and a penetrating voice. She cooks meals for the whole house and is loved by everyone. The French Mission tells me that, in peacetime, she was a militant Communist. But what of that?

This neighbourhood used to be very Red. The French say it's all been cleared up now. But I don't imagine for a moment that it has. The Reds have just been driven underground. Geoffrey Cass and I have our eye on a young schoolmaster who teaches his pupils that *le drapeau français n'est qu'une loque*. And there's the sinister man who blew up the Lille Town Hall in 1921. And there are many others.

The French police act on the whole energetically against Communists. But they dislike acting at all against their own nationals.

Communism has become a generic term. It doesn't mean membership of the party or even sympathy with Russian ideals so much as plain seditious behaviour. The danger from Russian Communism is that the Germans are using the Russian secret service organisation to cause trouble in France.

We're in the heart of industrial France here. Lille, Roubaix and Tourcoing among them pay 35 per

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cent. of all the taxes of France. Roubaix is supposed to be, *per capita*, the richest city in the world.

But alongside all this wealth goes terrible poverty and an abundance of vice.

There's a famous little street in Roubaix—the Rue Edouard Anseele—in which seven thousand people live. Every house in it's a brothel. The men and women you meet there are sub-human. They trade in all kinds of vice and perversion. I've raided it many times with the local *chef de sûreté*. From a Security point of view it's a dangerous place. Its inhabitants would sell France as casually as they would sell themselves or each other.

There are two places in Roubaix which the French police won't touch. One's the Soleil. The other's the Cigale. The Soleil is a charming country house discreetly and expensively run as a brothel. The Cigale is the meeting-place of all the rich pimps. Old men come there from all over France to buy their women. And the proprietor has just returned from doing five years for white slave traffic.

The trouble about working with the French is that it takes time to learn their weaknesses. On principle they're quite willing to co-operate. But each individual official has his blind spot. You have to find out what it is and avoid it, and all is well.

The British deplore the persistence of French graft. They are wasting their time. Graft is an essential part of French life. The cure for it would be to increase French official salaries. But that would upset the

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French tax-payer besides taking away what little fun there is in being a French official. Most French graft is on a small scale and comparatively harmless. The average Frenchman—although always eager to make a few francs on the side—would never do anything prejudicial to the interests of France.

Part of my job is to see that relations between the French and the British are cordial. It's the most difficult part of my job.

May 2nd

It's insufferably hot.

Spring has come at last. The magnolias at the Exhibition are in full bloom. Everywhere bud and blossom are doing their utmost to camouflage this ugly corner of industrial France. The livers of my superior officers are sluggish. Spring, for all its beauty, is an unhappy season of the year, restless and unfulfilled, like adolescence.

I wanted to sit in the sun and contemplate my navel. But there were a number of people to be visited.

First thing in the morning I went to call on Monsieur Lenfant. He's the Commissaire Spécial for Tourcoing. I visit him with reluctance. He's garlicky and the father of a terrible daughter who draws my sergeants into alcoves and frightens the life out of them. He has a quantity of rather unreliable agents in Belgium who tip him off about the movements of the German Secret Service. On this information I am expected to act. Many, many's the time I've sat up all night in a hole in the snow on the frontier because one of Monsieur Lenfant's agents thought that guns were going to be run. They never were.

Fortunately Monsieur Lenfant was out.

So I went to see Captain Croquette.

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I found him in a flutter because a new Brigadier of ours had just presented him with a plan for Frontier Control of which he entirely disapproved. Croquette's a dour little man. He's very efficient, but hard to work with. He considers the presence of the British—who are, after all, responsible for the frontier—as an unwarranted intrusion. He himself has been Captain of the Customs of this sector for years and years and dislikes interference. One of our patrols last week had the temerity to shoot a smuggler. Croquette nearly had a fit. He as good as told me—prodding me in the chest with a horny finger and saying: 'Saisissez? Saisissez?'—that smuggling is and always has been an honourable profession and must never be treated as criminal. I tried to explain to him about the War. But it was difficult. Finally I put him in a good temper by giving him a short recital of the idiocies and idiosyncrasies of the British. He was all smiles at once. He accompanied me to the door and gave me a huge bunch of lilies of the valley out of his garden.

I left Croquette and went to see the Commissaire Central in Roubaix. He's a very important man, surrounded by telephones and typewriters. He wears spats and a bowler hat, and has been decorated with the Legion of Honour.

The French are tougher than one realises. On our police raids we take a truck, into which are bundled all the drunks and suspects and syphilitic women. The French *agents de sûreté* treat them like cattle. They sort them out casually when we get back to the

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Mairie. On the whole, counting the bag is a dreary business. There's something infinitely depressing about this mass of bedraggled and unrepentant humanity. Only once in a blue moon do the police get a really wanted man. Then their whole behaviour changes. They become quick and savage and intolerant. The Ogpu and the Gestapo have nothing on the French when they're really on the job.

I went down to lunch at Corps.

Corps has been a haven to me ever since I came out here. Intelligence officers come and go. But there's a continuity of welcome at Corps.

It's mainly due to Geoffrey Cass, who, by an incredible series of gymnastics, has kept his job through all the palace revolutions of the higher command. Geoffrey is a contradiction in terms. He has a most pugnacious back. And his outlook and conversation are commendably militant. But at heart he is the most patient of human beings. He has a passion for French bulldogs. And with new recruits he is as gentle as a suckling mother.

He's the only Staff Captain I know who isn't obsessed with the idea that he ought to be a Major.

The G 2 is also a charmer. He wouldn't thank me for saying that he isn't like a soldier. He is, in fact, a very good soldier. But he has a wider-ranging intelligence and greater courtesy than one has a right to expect from soldiers.

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This afternoon I gave a Security lecture to a new and rather intimidated territorial field regiment. It's the fortieth lecture I've given. I talked from the stage of the local theatre. They rang a curtain up on me. And the C.O., who's a Lowland Scot, startled me by introducing me as the 'Head of the Secret Service.' The audience was well behaved, but a bit bigger than I like. When I'd finished the C.O. got up and thanked me. Then he turned to his men and roared at them: 'That's wha' I'm always telling ye. Keep your mouths shut.'

I played a little poker after dinner in the Mess and lost a few francs. The Mess is quiet but pleasant. The food isn't bad. And we have a fine collection of wine, including a Corton Charlemagne '29 and a sound Cotes Roties. The Divisional staff works far too hard. 'A' Mess collapses by dinner-time and scarcely has the energy to eat. 'B' Mess is a bit more sprightly.

A pleasant and unmilitary sapper dined in the Mess with us. It is a comfort to find that the New Army thinks less and less about tigers and more and more about the symphonies of Sibelius.

May 3rd

I'VE just received a summons to have dinner next Tuesday with the D.M.I. at G.H.Q. I don't know what I've done to deserve such an honour. Possibly one or another of my Security memoranda has reached him. I've been pelting them at my superiors ever since I came out here. I didn't know they ever got farther than the waste-paper basket at Corps.

One of our C.O.s sits down after dinner almost every night to play Bridge with three of his officers and four bottles of champagne. This is in the finest military tradition. If I were Commander-in-Chief I should always travel with twelve dancing-girls and a hundred and fifty dozen of claret.

Today's reporting day. Writing my summaries is rather a labour. My superiors always insist—rather naturally—on perfect accuracy. And accuracy has never interested me very much. By trade I'm an imaginative writer. I have trained myself for years to build and embroider on a bare minimum of facts.

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The ruthless documentation I am now forced to do is the severest discipline I have ever endured. Even now, after all these months, there is something abnormal about my reports. Geoffrey Cass complains that they are like editorials of the *New Yorker*.

G.H.Q. has an unlimited appetite for small facts. They receive my oblations of facts—particularly when they are such as to determine the date of birth and personal idiosyncrasies of obscure Polish women living in Geneva—with more enthusiasm than they receive my suggestions for Improving the British Army. I find this surprising.

My F.S.P.'s reports vary considerably. Child always exaggerates. Carter always understates. Allo writes the history of his life. Green has to be coaxed for hours before he will reveal anything at all.

I have tried to turn all these men into specialists.

Child and Bustard seem to be very happy in Roubaix. They've found themselves excellent billets. They go to symphony concerts and dinner parties and know everyone. Brown, in Tourcoing, lives a vivid life of his own. I try not to find out how he spends his time. But his reports are admirable. And the end justifies the means.

Finally there's the office where my Sergeant-Major and I sit and gossip and drink coffee and hatch policy and entertain the world. My Sergeant-Major's twenty-four and looks like Buddha. He's a Scot. He was a Regular corporal before the War. And it's taken me a long time to demilitarise him. But now we're great

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friends. All the work of the office is done by Mingay, who wandered unhappily from one F.S.P. job to another until he finally settled down here as Sergeant-Clerk. The rest of the section is a sort of flying-squad. It consists of all the youngest and hardiest men I have who are prepared to go out on any kind of job at any hour of the night or day. We have one Militia boy, Green. He's our mascot.

Most of these people are lance-corporals. But I often let them put up three stripes. This impresses the French and enables them to eat in the Sergeants' Mess. There's an unwritten rule in the Section that anyone going home on leave may temporarily dress up as a sergeant for the benefit of his friends and relations. The general atmosphere here is not very regimental. I think that's an advantage. F.S.P. must be sufficiently military to get on with the troops. But they must also keep their outlook supple, as they have to deal so much with civilians. By and large they are more like a French army unit than a British one.

My report this week includes an urgent plea that we should do more propaganda in Belgium. The Germans are going full blast with their propaganda. But all the information coming from over the frontier suggests that we are doing nothing. It is a little alarming. The Germans have already persuaded large numbers of Belgians that we are responsible for the War.

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I know that that's a very different thing from persuading them that they want us to lose it. But it's a pity.

The Allies have made a terrible hash of their propaganda, as usual. I can't think why. We have a wonderful case. All we have to do is state it. There are certain difficulties in stating and restating the obvious and making it new and enthralling. But they are technical difficulties. We want creative artists on the job. The big men have always found inspiration enough in the simple truths of Christianity.

I don't know whether it's through national modesty. But we certainly are reluctant to come out into the open and admit that this War is a crusade. And it should be fought as a crusade. We ought all to hitch ourselves up onto a slightly higher moral plane. Armaments are important. Economics are important. But they are nothing without the crusading spirit. We have behind us all the power of the Churches. There's the Church of Rome with its authority and the Protestant Church with its moral strength and the Jewish Church enveloped in all the dark magic of the Old Testament. For the first time in history the three great Churches are on the same side. How can the poor superstitious little German stand up against the weight of these three gigantic philosophies? This is a truism. And yet nobody states it. Our tragedy is that the War has found us without spiritual leaders.

Meanwhile, the Powers of Evil—those sad, neurotic, overgrown schoolboys masquerading as the Powers of

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Evil—stalk abroad. And there's no one to lay their ghosts.

The French are frightened of the Germans. They are wrong. The only emotion a sane man need feel for the Germans is a certain wary scorn.

The French are conducting this war altogether too timidly. Hitler hits the headlines at least once a fortnight. The Royal Navy, with its Narvik and River Plate actions, has hit them once or twice. The French never hit headlines at all. I can't help feeling that the French army will grow apathetic if it is never given the tonic of an occasional victory.

It is our job, as the sturdier and more dependable of the Allies, to electrify the French.

I wish I could get out of the habit of wanting to run the War.

May 4th

THE General's going about with a long face. He's just been given the Aldershot Command. It's promotion, of course, and a very good appointment. But the General would prefer to stay with his Division, which he's nursed and trained for years, until it's now the best Division in the B.E.F.

The B.E.F.'s a grand little fighting force. It has stood up to its long winter of digging and patrolling and manning A/A guns and being bored by ENSA with fortitude. The soldier's needs are few. Give him food, sleep and a football and he seems quite contented. He has enough of all three out here. The officer's a more difficult proposition. He's an easy-going creature in peace-time and doesn't take kindly to all the work that's suddenly expected of him now. But, all told, he's done remarkably well.

It will be interesting to see how the Militia men fit into the army framework. They are mostly responsible citizens. About 80 per cent. of them come from

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established jobs. They may find the extreme disparity between officer and man a little hard to stomach at first. The army is rather a reactionary service.

The French Mission was good enough to visit our frontier this afternoon. I was detailed to accompany them. We went in seven cars, looking like a Royal procession. The only one of the French I knew at all well was De Vogué, son of the Suez Canal man. He's a liaison officer at G.H.Q. The rest I found rather frightening. They were very beautifully dressed. I'm so used to the tumbledown appearance of our local officials that I'd quite forgotten what a radiant object a French cavalryman can be. The General himself wasn't impressive. But his Staff blazed. One Captain, who wore about thirty medals and a tall red hat and saluted right up in the air above his head, might well have been an Italian. And the others weren't far inferior.

I don't understand about French medals. Apparently you wear what you like. If you feel depressed you don't wear any at all. If you feel in good form you put up everything you can lay your hands on. I once saw an old General dining at Moitrier in Metz. He wore a single medal, which swung from a long ribbon like an elderly negress's breast. I imagine that he had turned in all his other medals in order to buy one really good one. Most Frenchmen wear medal

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ribbons pinned haphazard to their tunics like patterns for the new drawing-room curtains.

The French were disturbed by our frontier. Something drastic will have to be done about it. A *commission ambulante* is going to be appointed, which will decide exactly where the geographical boundary runs and what families are to be evacuated from near it. How we all curse Metternich! It was he who drew the French frontier at the Congress of Vienna. The *ballons* all round France are where his ink blobbed. Until Metternich defined it, the frontier had never existed. The boundaries between France and whatever Great Power happened to possess Flemish territory were left to the imagination. It was a much more satisfactory arrangement. Now, on this Divisional front alone, it's going to cost someone fourteen miles of barbed wire to separate the French from their friends the Belgians. As De Vogué remarked:

'The only cure for this situation is to annexe Belgium.'

While we were walking along a dried-up marsh near Halluin the French General suddenly knelt down. 'Tiens,' he said. 'Des violettes.' And he began to pick them. Soon the whole French Mission was on its knees picking violets and ecstatically smelling them. Having picked them, like children they didn't

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know what to do with them. So they presented them to an English Colonel, who was forced to walk about with them for the rest of the afternoon, looking furious.

May 5th

It's Sunday to-day.

Sunday's always a bad day for the B.E.F. The French dress up in their best clothes and parade the streets. There are family reunions. Proud fathers home on short leave from the Maginot Line trail their children round to see their grandmothers. The B.E.F. feels a little lonely and homesick on Sundays.

The French parade the streets while the Divisional Staff sits and sweats in its offices preparing appreciations. It is thought necessary for us to work twelve-hour days seven days a week.

I'd hate to be a French child. It must be undignified to have to sit in one of those hideous prams, which are so constructed that you can never lie down and sleep in them. And French children's clothes are a perpetual embarrassment. It always seems to me that children aren't sufficiently provided for in the French scheme of existence. French children look like tired mice. They are embryo grown-up people and not children at all.

I had lunch with the local priest. He's a friend for whom I'm indebted to our dear Friar Tuck of an

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R.C. padre, Major Clarke. Although I'm not a Catholic—and anxious not to become one—I know most of the priests in the neighbourhood. They're grand people. They're fighting priests. In the last war they fought as ordinary private soldiers. The local priest is not rich. He lives in a small house, which is mostly a big living-room. He is waited on by his *gouvernante*, who's a superb cook. He himself is a lean, grey man. He speaks beautiful eighteenth-century French. He's a militant patriot. He deplores the servile behaviour of the South German priests who have given in to Hitler and shrunk from a martyr's crown. He thinks the British troops have been a great help in consolidating Anglo-French relations. I rather agree. Of course, the people up here are very like ourselves in many ways. They're a bit dour and rather hard to understand. But they're solid. I'd feel less anxious about the future if the rest of France was as solid as the North. The North is a priest-breeding country. Halluin, for example, turns out more priests per square yard than any other town in France. The North breeds priests. The South breeds politicians.

The priests are very firmly established in France. Canadians and others say that France is atheistic. That is only in part true. The form—and often the substance—of religion is everywhere to be found in France. And the religion is the Roman Catholic Faith. The priests up here are not at all bigoted. They are surprisingly outspoken in their admiration of many of the qualities of Protestantism. But then they are

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on firm ground. The Roman Catholic Church, in spite of political negations, is the National Church of France. In England, on the other hand, there is something faintly seditious about Roman Catholicism. All its martyrs, from Campion onwards, have plotted against the established Church and Government. There must have been a time—way back before 1500—when the village priest was as familiar and well-loved a figure in England as he still is in France. Now he's inclined to be a foreigner.

After lunch I went and collected my brother-in-law, Victor, and took him to a Bridge drive in Lille. Victor's buying steel for the British and French armies. He often passes through Lille or Arras on his way from Paris to Brussels. It's queer to see him in civilian clothes among so many soldiers. And his presence raises constant Security problems. He has a passport on which is written NOT VALID FOR ANY MILITARY ZONE. He has only to show this and he is at once let through by any French official. He has never yet been asked for his proper authorisations. I despair of ever getting the French to take any notice of our Security precautions.

I found Victor slightly drunk. He'd been lunching with a Highland regiment.

'But how did you find them?'

'A man I met in a bar told me where they were.'

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'What sort of a man?'

'A British officer.'

'Did you know him?'

'Never seen him in my life before.'

'Didn't he seem suspicious of you?'

'Not in the least.'

'Good God!'

The trouble with the British is that they are incurably friendly. It's an attractive failing. But it makes life difficult for a Security officer.

The Bridge drive was fun. It was a tonic. It was so utterly remote from the world of war in which I am forced to live during the week. There were no Englishmen present. In fact, the only uniform was worn by a retired French General with one arm. There was quite a big crowd of people. The players were the industrial magnates of Northern France and their wives. And for the occasion the Cercle—the Marlborough Club of Lille—had thrown open its usually inhospitable doors. Here we talked and drank champagne and played an occasional rubber, while children shook collecting-boxes for some charity or other in our faces. The society of Lille is curious. The men are clean and elderly—there's an Edwardian atmosphere of eau-de-Cologne and clean linen about them—and the women are very chic and intelligent, with faces like the factories for which they were married.

The Drive was sponsored by the Descamps family, who are the most delightful family imaginable. They are rich. Madame Descamps's brother is proprietor

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of the Petite Gironde. Monsieur Descamps is related by marriage to the Beghin sugar-works and to most of the other successful enterprises in the neighbourhood. But the Descamps themselves are in a class of their own. They are alive and human and gay. I dined with them *en famille* last week. The talk was the best I'd heard in France. It went at a pace that was quite breath-taking. And when I got home at nearly midnight I realised that the War had never been mentioned.

We enjoyed our Bridge drive although we lost money.

I took Victor back to dinner in the Mess. He was in good form. The Mess is *naïf* and ignorant of Big Business. Victor's tall stories—made taller by an occasional swig of old Mirabelle—were a great success. I have a secret admiration for Victor. He knows his job. And he knows how to dramatise it. We all went to bed feeling that we know how the world is run.

May 6th

IT is foolish to imagine that France is a democracy. France is only superficially a democracy. Fundamentally she has not changed at all in centuries. Power is in the hands of a few families, just as it always has been and always will be. And, roughly speaking, they are the same few families. France is nearly always on the brink of another Revolution. If it takes place, it will be for the same reasons and with the same ultimate results as the last one. I pray that it may be delayed until after this War is over. That depends on whether the French can be persuaded to go on disliking the Germans more than they dislike each other. I think they can. Of course, the Fifth Column is working hard to magnify discord. And it is unfortunate that the French Right has taken advantage of the War to get back all the concessions it had reluctantly made to the working-classes during the last ten years.

My play, *The Jersey Lily*, which has been running quite happily in London for the last few months, comes off this week. It is sad that I shall never have seen it. It is going to be produced in America in the

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autumn. Maybe a miracle will happen and I shall be able to see it then.

My work here doesn't give me much time for writing. But I have been tinkering with an old play of mine—*The Maiden Phœnix*—which is a play about the last years of Queen Elizabeth. It is written in robust Elizabethan English and might be a good recruiting play. My Sheridan play has had to be shelved. If I had a wound and a good long convalescence I'd write a play about William Pitt. It would be aimed straight at the American public. America's position now is much the same as ours was in 1800. It is significant that our main contribution to the Napoleonic Wars was financial.

A French journalist came to lunch with me. He's War Correspondent for the *Petit Gironde*. He's a distinguished man, I believe. But I can't remember his name. He talked mournfully of the condition of France. In fact, now I come to think of it, I've scarcely ever met a distinguished Frenchman who didn't talk mournfully about the condition of France. It's a queer privilege they have. I remember being very startled months ago when an airman—a member of the French Mission in London—confided in me that the French had not a single aeroplane, and that the German Air Force outnumbered ours by at least ten to one. Now I'm used to such talk. I love the French.

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Their way of life is a fine one. And their civilisation is a precious inheritance. But they are their own worst propagandists.

There's a man in the Mess who has strayed out of the nineteenth century. He's a gunner and an expert on gas. But I can only see him sitting in a box at the old Gaiety, wearing a choker and an opera-hat, quizzing the chorus, and then later pinching their behinds at Romano's.

A farmer is reported to be ploughing his field in the shape of arrows pointing straight at an aerodrome and at some petrol-dumps. This has caused a considerable flutter. Sargette has had the farmer, who's a Belgian, arrested. And he's asked us to climb all high buildings in the neighbourhood and see what we can see. We're all too lazy for that sort of adventure. So we're indenting for a helicopter. The helicopter, which is attached to the Corps, is unpopular just now, as it ran out of petrol the other day and landed in a beet-field. One of our Brigadiers, who was on board, had to walk nine miles home. Also the French A/A gunners have a habit of pooping off at it.

The sinister ploughing was first reported by Gandy. He's almost the youngest and quite the most enter-

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prising of my F.S.P. He's an intolerant man who chivvies more information out of people than they had meant to give him.

I dined Chez Maurice with Ronald Cartland. He's one of the very few M.P.s mobilised in this Army. He's a man of enormous vitality who's shot up within a few months to being a Major in command of a battery. His services here have been better appreciated than they were in the House of Commons, where he's beaten his wings ineffectually for years against the Tory majority. He's rabidly anti-Chamberlain. He's waiting for another secret session, when he'll go and attack the old gentleman once again for apathy and ignorance.

Chez Maurice is my favourite pub in Lille. The fat and wheezy proprietor is friendly. His wife knows how to cook. And it has so far escaped the herd-instincts of the British officer.

Another good pub is the Taverne Alsacienne, where they have thirty varieties of Alsatian wine. It was there that I once performed a noble Anglo-French gesture by haranguing a lot of Lille students who were celebrating the departure of one of their number for the Maginot Line.

May 7th

I'M gradually getting used to the Army. At first there was something unreal about it all. I've spent so many years in the theatre that red tabs and medals and riding-boots remind me irresistibly of old actors dressed up to play in war plays. Now I take the moustaches and the peculiar shapes for granted. But nothing will convince me that soldiering is an adult occupation.

We did a snap-control on traffic this morning. The results were satisfactory for a wonder. Everyone was carrying a pass. Six months ago quite 30 per cent. of Frenchmen made no attempt to carry identity papers of any kind. The police fined them forty francs a time and no questions were asked. Hitler himself could have got into the *zone des armées* on payment of forty francs. I pointed this out. But the French police told me not to worry. They assured me that enemy agents always had their papers in perfect order.

I'm planning snap-controls on trains and on trams. For these I have to get the co-operation of Captain Cuny of the *garde mobile*. He's a charming young man with a talent for getting round French law.

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Technically he has no right to do searches at all. It's a privilege reserved for the *douane*. But that doesn't bother him. If he wants to search a house, he puts his foot inside the front door and says in his most authoritative voice:

'Do you refuse to allow me to search your house?'

Very few people dare protest. If they do, they are at once suspect. Cuny detains them and sends for the proper authorisation. He thinks he can work the same system for my trams and trains.

The *garde mobile* are a lot of thugs. They are shock troops. They go about in pairs on motor-bicycle-combinations which are fitted with machine guns. They wear strange crash-helmets and look like something out of *The Insect Play*. They are supposed to be incorruptible. They terrify the *douane*, on whom they act as a sort of cross-check.

I dined with the D.M.I. We had a very good dinner at the old Univers pub. There were just the three of us: the D.M.I., myself and his Labrador dog, which behaved in a most cowardly way when attacked by the local cat.

The D.M.I. is the most impressive personality I've met out here. He's a fighting soldier by temperament and obviously a very good one. But he also has a lucid brain. There's nothing mysterious about him. He will answer questions to the point of indiscretion. He doesn't leave you—like most soldiers and all politicians do—feeling that you're not to be trusted with information.

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He also has the big man's talent for making you think your opinions are of value.

It was a relief to be talking to him. I've been weighed down since I joined the Army by the Chain of Command. In a profession where whole groups of people are liable to be blown sky-high, continuity is obviously vital. The man who carries everything about in his head is a menace. And I appreciate the necessity for sticking to the correct channels. But it's a system which is extremely irksome to a civilian. In my private affairs I always go straight to the man at the top. I can't be bothered with clerks and secretaries and assistants. In the Army that's impossible. A report—however urgent—has to go from the bottom to the top by a long series of progressions. And it's very liable to be lost or suppressed on the way. As the French say: *'Il y a toujours des creux.'* There's an element of hunt-the-slipper in reporting. I differ from most Army people in that I want to know what's happened to my reports and whether any action has been taken on them. For that reason it was an immense relief to be able for once to miss out all the intervening links in the chain and talk to the man at the top.

It was also an immense relief to discover how much he knew about what was going on.

The top suffers just as much as the bottom from the Chain of Command. Military Intelligence is a sneaking branch of the Army. It cuts—or should cut—across normal channels. Properly handled, it ought

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to give the Commander-in-Chief a *querschnitt* of all that's going on in the area occupied by the troops under his command.

The great military virtue of holding the baby is fatal to Military Intelligence. Battalion Commanders fail to report deserters because they don't want their regiment to get a bad name. Brigadiers suffocate appalling crimes within the brigade area for the same reason. Division follows suit. Carried to its logical extreme, this system might lead to the complete disintegration of the British Army without the knowledge of the Commander-in-Chief.

To be precise: we had a case of a young man going round pointing out to British soldiers houses in which were living women whose husbands were in the Maginot Line. Quite obviously these were German tactics. But not much was done in the way of reporting them for fear of disgracing the regiment concerned.

To be successful, our Army ought to be commanded by gangsters.

There are two schools of thought in the French High Command concerning the future of the War. Some think it will never start at all on the Western Front. France and Germany will sit and wait for each other to disintegrate from within. Others say the Germans will attack during the next two months. They

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will then have reached their maximum strength on land and in the air in relation to ourselves. More and more experts are leaning towards the second view.

I asked the D.M.I. how and where the attack would come. He said it would either come against the Maginot Line or against the Gembloux gap. It would come with a force that would absolutely amaze everybody. I asked him what would happen. He said we had only to sit tight, keep our heads and shoot straight and the War would be won.

It is a consolation to know that the French are on the alert for a German attack. It will be disappointing now if it doesn't come.

The French Staff is expert at the mathematics of possibilities.

The D.M.I. wants me to lecture to the French liaison school. He also said he'd like me to write some stuff for translation and publication in French newspapers.

I told him I'd like to go round my area with a Security lecture and a truck containing a couple of propaganda films.

He talked to me of many things: of India and Vienna and Hungary and Germany and Downing Street and Whitehall and amateur theatricals and fishing and pigsticking and Scotland.

I drove home feeling less forgotten, less useless.

May 8th

ALLO reports that the Belgians have just had a secret trial mobilisation. I went up to our Southern sector to verify this. It appears to be true. Most of Allo's information is accurate.

Our relations with the French Customs people on this front are excellent. We have an intelligent Brigadier in command here who approaches problems in a sensible and quite unorthodox way. The French see the point of him and function.

The Customs Captain is a charming little man called Protin, with a round stomach and no authority whatsoever over his subordinates. His two Lieutenants, Brissard and Mercier, roar with laughter at the very idea of obeying his orders. Fortunately we get on well with all three. Mercier is an exhausted man with false teeth and a tiny black moustache, who smells faintly of lemons and reminds me of my old nurse. He will agree to almost anything which doesn't involve him personally in extra work. Brissard is dynamic and looks like an assassin. He's great fun to work with. My two sergeants, Allo and Carter, get

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on so well with him that he calls them '*mes enfants*' and has asked them to come back after the War and join the Customs service. They are both bilingual. Carter lives in Pau and has a French mother. Allo is the Jersey bus-driver. He writes to his parents in French and to his wife in English.

We've evolved a system of dual French and British frontier control in this sector which functions admirably. Brissard likes our help, as he is always short of men. Reinforcements were supposed to be arriving many months ago from Strasbourg. But there's an argument going on between the Ministry of War and the Ministry of the Interior as to which department shall pay for the train that's to bring them here. Meanwhile they don't arrive.

Our main difficulties in dealing with the *douaniers* are financial. The French have an odious system by which 40 per cent. of the value of all smuggled goods captured is divided amongst the *douaniers*. The result is that the *douaniers* are not in the least interested in closing the frontier. All they want to do is catch smugglers. As it's essential to us that the frontier should be closed completely, it's obvious that we shall never agree on a general policy. We get on well with Brissard because he's a realist and understands this difficulty. And I'm pretty sure that he has a private foolproof financial racket of his own.

The immediate boss of both Croquette and Protin is a little Creole Major who lives in Lille and thinks in terms of percentages. His name's Le Marchand.

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He has frizzy hair and pouting lips and the voice of a castrato. He ought to wear blue satin with turned-up slippers and an enormous turban on his head. Then he could take his proper place in a French classical tragedy.

Brissard is in a good temper these days. He's catching smugglers every night. The British patrols help him. And, to his joy, there's a new order through that the British patrols aren't allowed to share the prize-money.

In peace-time there's a great trade round here in smuggled butter. One old woman, known to everyone, used to pack butter round her bottom and her bosom. It became embarrassing to undress her every time she passed through the control. So they used to sit her down by a very hot stove until she melted away.

Now, alas, the Customs control is not nearly so entertaining! We find a great reluctance on the part of *douaniers* not to trust everyone they know by sight. It's in vain that we point out that familiar faces are often the most dangerous. In this part of the country the eldest son of a family goes into the Customs service and, as likely as not, his younger brothers become smugglers. It's a queer form of nepotism.

I should think that being a *douanier* must be the most depressing of jobs. You sit in a wooden hut for hours at a time. And nothing ever happens. It isn't surprising that *douaniers* drink and go to sleep on duty and indulge in mild subversive activities. The

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austerity of character expected of them is altogether out of proportion to the salaries they receive.

I dined quietly with my landlords. They are very sweet people. They have housed me all these months and given me baths and breakfasts with never a hint of payment. The only thing I can do for them in return is to have coffee sent over from England. When I first suggested doing this they said:

'But surely, if there's a shortage of coffee in France, there must also be a shortage of coffee in England.'
They are great Anglophiles.

May 9th

It's a rather sultry day.

Work in the office has practically come to a standstill. Mingay's on leave. Green and Gandy have had powerful anti-tetanus injections and are lying miserably on the floor. Baird is out somewhere playing hockey. My new batman is busy colouring the Gringoire cartoons which adorn the office walls.

I have two batmen now. My original one can't drive a car. And there's a new order that, on my establishment, I must have someone who can maintain both a car and our fourteen motor-bicycles. So a week ago the R.A.S.C. sent me along an intelligent young man who's in civilian life a director of Knight, Frank & Rutley. He's a great success. But he doesn't exactly replace my old batman, because this latter's regiment has disappeared and he stays on with me until it can be found again. Meanwhile both men call me in the morning. Both men run my bath. And both men bring me up my breakfast. And for this hazardous and uncomfortable existence I am compensated by a Field Allowance of three shillings a day.

It is a pure coincidence that I have no car.

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Allo's report on Belgian mobilisation has gone up to Corps over the General's signature. Allo writes picturesque English. Referring to the secrecy of the mobilisation, he writes: 'Only little people have seen it.' It's a charming thought.

The Lambresart tennis club has thrown itself open to British officers and I have bought a tennis racket for thirty francs. I wonder whether this is perhaps a rather optimistic gesture.

Joe Fairlie lunched with me in Lille. He's head of the Public Relations Department—or, as I prefer to call it, the Unemployment Platoon—at G.H.Q. He's the original Bulldog Drummond. He's a man I like a lot. We grumble mildly together, feeling we have specialised talent which isn't being used. Today we both felt happy. He's going on leave. And I have prospects of being moved to a higher and freer job. So we lunched at the Huitrière, which is where the Generals go, and drank the last bottle in stock of Château Chalon '21, a lovely, dry, sherry-like wine of the Juras, much admired by Metternich, but neglected by the modern Frenchman.

The new Security officer in Lille, Arthur Marshall, is now settled in. He has set up a vast map of the

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city in his office and marked on it all the brothels and all the houses in which crimes have been committed. It rather looks as if he was starting a tourist agency.

Lille is the magnet of the B.E.F. Officers and men come flocking in on the slightest provocation. The town's had a real boom. Freddy—in spite of the fact that he has to close at 10 p.m.—is reputed to have made £40,000 out of his dreary little night-club behind the Bellevue Hotel. All the bars have made fortunes. The shops have done less well. But the citizens of Lille, who'd evacuated themselves early in the war, are beginning to trickle back. And ordinary trade is at least up to normal. The youth of Lille resent the British because they can afford to buy their women away from them. Their elders, with memories of the German occupation during the last war, prefer the British to the Germans. At least I think they do.

There's not much in the way of entertainment here. A couple of cinemas show out-of-date films. On Sundays there's always some sort of a splash at the local theatre. On New Year's Day I went to see Jean Weber, specially released from military service, playing *L'Aiglon*. And Geoffrey Cass took his policemen, for the good of their souls, to see *La Dame aux Camélias* and some old *sociétaires* of the *Comédie Française* in *Cyrano*.

The British efforts are well-meaning, but rather second-rate. I'm told that Basil Dean's method of recruiting Ensa concert-parties is to stick his head round any old actors' pub and say:

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'Has anyone not had any work for a very long time?'

Henson's been. And so has George Formby. And I went to hear Gracie Fields, who still looked a very sick woman, carrying a big programme single-handed in her usual magnificent way. But they don't come often. And the second-class companies are terrible. It's a pity. All the troops want is homely bodies who'll sing popular songs and let them join in the choruses. They don't somehow seem to get them.

Will Hay was in Lille tonight. The theatre was packed out. I meant to go and hear him. But I stayed too long talking to Vignoles, who's my opposite number in the next Division.

There was an air-raid warning at 10. We walked back from the Alsacienne to Arthur Marshall's office for refuge. All the searchlights were playing. And some A/A guns were firing. Lille looks very beautiful at night under the stars. The big square looks like a theatrical set. The houses seem two-dimensional.

The French, who never bother to shade their headlights in the usual way, take their *alertes* seriously. I was nearly hit on the head by a policeman for lighting a match.

I walked home. A small boy of fifteen accompanied me part of the way. He was flashing a large torch and officiously stopping cars on the road and telling them

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they were showing too much light. He confided in me that he was an air-raid warden. This surprised me. But I think it's a healthy sign. In France neither politics nor A.R.P. are treated with the same reverence as in England.

May 10th

SO THERE'S to be a real war after all.

I was woken up at six this morning by Allo. He was standing saluting at the end of my bed wearing a tin hat and with a smile on his face.

'I told you so, Sir,' he said.

Germany has invaded Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg.

I haven't any comment to make.

I feel rather sick. War is something that happens to other people. In my heart I'd had a faint, mean hope that perhaps it wouldn't happen to me. That hope is now shattered. I must take a hold of myself and see what courage I can muster.

The news didn't reach Division till breakfast-time.

All the morning the local inhabitants stood about in huddles and chattered. There doesn't seem to be much enthusiasm. I remember around Christmas-time the cheerful way in which the Belgians declared that an invasion would be the finest New Year's present the Germans could give them. And the French felt much the same. Now it's different. I believe the majority of the French feel as I do. They hoped that the Germans would attack in the East or blow up inside or somehow lose their vindictiveness.

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There's been great aerial activity all day.

At lunch in the Mess I looked at my fellow-members with new eyes. For months they've been bored. They've grumbled a lot. They've dragged themselves wearily to their dull offices and dutifully attended dull exercises. Today they seem to have taken on a new lease of life. They're calm. But they're extremely cheerful.

The men, too, seem thoroughly gay. There's a great sharpening of knives going on all through the Division. Even my F.S.P., who aren't technically a combatant body, are full of fight.

By contrast the French are sullen and scared.

We spent the day feverishly packing up the office. As I'd expected, we have accumulated far more than we can carry. The Ordnance people are going to be left with an immense dump of discarded possessions. Fortunately we are G.H.Q. reserves. We don't go into action quite as soon as some of the other Divisions.

We've learned with relief that the Belgians and the Dutch are both fighting and have asked us to come in and help them. There's been a doubt in many people's minds as to whether the Dutch might not pack up without a struggle.

I went up to the frontier and watched one of our Divisions going through. The Belgians were welcoming them enthusiastically. They were travelling at a good speed, but were too closely spaced, I thought. They'd suffer heavily if the Germans took it into their heads to bomb them.

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There are so far no reports of sabotage on the route.

Until a few weeks ago it was my job to go right ahead of Division into Brussels. But that's now been changed. My F.S.P. will attach themselves to brigades and battalions and move with them. I and my office staff will wait and clear up behind.

I'm seriously handicapped through not having a car. My own is broken down with thrust trouble. The R.A.S.C. are evacuating it and have sent an urgent demand to G.H.Q. for a replacement. But G.H.Q. don't at present seem anxious to be helpful.

We had dinner to the accompaniment of guns firing and a few bombs dropping. In time I suppose I shall get used to them. At present they seem like noises off in a war play.

May 11th

I DIDN'T go to bed last night. Division was beginning to move. And there were a lot of vulnerable spots to keep an eye on. I dodged from dump to dump, reassuring myself that everything was properly guarded. The sentry on the Old Fort at Bondues, where Corps has 2,000,000 gallons of petrol stored, nearly shot me for my trouble.

There were no reports of sabotage.

German reconnaissance 'planes came over during the night. They didn't drop any bombs. The A/A guns fired off at them dutifully. Even the Bofors joined in, beautifying the night with showers of pink stars, although all the 'planes were at least 10,000 feet beyond their range.

Divisional Headquarters moved at four in the morning. It was only a short move—a couple of miles up the road—to a location just off the main L. of C.

We've been given a charming old house as an office. It is grey and covered with wistaria, and looks as if it was made of rice-paper. It has a beautiful garden. It's just the sort of place I'd like to bring my family to for a long, peaceful summer.

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My F.S.P. have discovered a croquet set and spent the afternoon mowing the lawn and playing croquet while we waited for a movement order to go into Belgium.

The cares of the Divisional Staff have fallen away overnight. No more appreciations are necessary or possible. They have nothing in the world to do except seek out the enemy and fight him.

The spirits of the local inhabitants seem to be improving. I went up to Wattrelos to see the first of our brigades passing through. The French were very gay. A siren sounded. And they all dived happily into the nearest pub for an *apéritif alerte*. A huge woman with bare feet and a flowing bosom assured me that at the end of the War Hitler would be given to the women of France. I feel that the women of France will beat the Germans even if the men don't.

The Wattrelos siren makes a noise like an old sheep bleating into an amplifier.

We shall soon know now whether our Army is properly equipped or not. A great many words have been spilled in the Press on the subject. But very few facts have emerged. It is obvious that our Government has been incompetent and that our Ministry of

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Supply has dawdled. That's our own fault. We ought to have kicked out the honest Tories ages ago. The more crooks and thugs Winston Churchill can stuff into his new Government, the better we shall be pleased. Chamberlain has made only one mistake. He should have resigned from office on the 3rd of September. If he had done so, he would have gone down to history as a great Prime Minister.

It's all a matter of timing.

The tragedy of Modern Europe is that Blum came into power ten years too late. His forty-hour week was a magnificent conception. But it was a major disaster for us all that it happened to coincide with the realisation in Germany of the twenty-four-hour day.

We needn't reproach ourselves with having failed to rearm, but only with having failed to prevent the Germans from rearming. Baldwin's conscience must be uneasy for having misled us for so many years.

Our new Mess is in the magnificent house of an old lawyer who's evacuated himself to the South of France. There's a portrait of our host in the dining-room. He's wearing the beautiful and archaic robes of the French Bar. He has shrewd eyes and a little pointed beard. His hand is placed firmly on a thick, leather-bound book, while he surveys the room benignly,

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preparing to address us. He is the type of all educated Frenchmen since the days of Henry of Navarre. He represents the fine, clearly drawn, static French civilisation which we are fighting to preserve.

May 12th

A LONG and rather anxious day of waiting. The A.D.M.S. tells me that the Belgian medical services have broken down completely and that we are taking them over.

The Germans seem to be hitting pretty hard. There's some possibility that we may be diverted from our straight-through-to-Brussels move and sent down east to help the French. If we do, it will mean turning ourselves into a suicide squad.

I had my hair cut in Lille. The old man who has cut it every week since I've been in France didn't seem unduly perturbed by the developments of the War. He gave me a dissertation on the respective merits of Spanish and Swedish steel for razor-blades. I told him I was shortly going *à la ligne*. His only comment was:

'Then perhaps I'd better cut your hair a little shorter.'

Arthur Marshall is taking care of my private papers—notes, reports, scraps of journal—for me. He's staying in Lille and looking after all my area when I go into Belgium. Lille ought to be safe enough.

I've just had a letter from Jeanne saying that Lady

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Halifax went to the last night of *The Jersey Lily* and liked it a lot. How queer it all seems! Jeanne's letter might have come from another world. And yet it was only posted on the evening before the Germans walked into Belgium.

I'm wondering how my F.S.P. are going to react to war. They are a practically non-combatant body. Most of them aren't even armed. And they haven't been trained and seasoned for fighting like the rest of the B.E.F. And yet from now on they will be right ahead with forward brigades. Most of them are made of good, tough stuff. There are only two about whose ultimate courage I have misgivings. They'll need a little watching.

At any moment now we shall leave this peaceful place and go off into the void.

May 13th

DIVISION finally moved out today. We weren't switched East, as we had feared. I sighed with relief as our last truck swung through into Belgium. My main job here was to see that Division went into action intact. And it has done so.

I am still without a car.

I spent the morning chasing a troop-carrying company. At the very last moment it was discovered that one brigade was half a company short. And I was sent off to see if I couldn't locate it somewhere. It took me two hours. All communications are now suspended. And the wretched troop-carrying companies have been working overtime ever since last Friday. It struck me as odd that our mobile Army is so lacking in mobility. It doesn't particularly matter now. But if we're ever asked to retreat, there will be a lot of foot-slogging for the infantry battalions.

Thin streams of refugees are beginning to appear on the roads. They're mostly men, and they're mostly on bicycles with a heap of red blankets tied on behind them.

There are persistent rumours of parachutists. None of them have yet been substantiated. But my F.S.P. have been kept on the hop all day. I don't think the good citizens of France have yet learned to distinguish

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between parachutes and the little white puffs of smoke made by the A/A guns. A wild rumour came in at tea-time concerning two parachutists who had been captured and were being taken by tram to the *Mairie* in Lille when they were set upon and lynched by the crowd in the main square. I could find no foundation for this.

I'm taking with me a radio and a bottle of Old Londonderry Pot-still 1910. Green won't be parted from his new football boots.

John Stevens has gone right on ahead to do reconnaissance. I am temporarily Intelligence Officer as well as Security Officer.

At the very last moment I've been sent a new recruit. His name's Hand, and he was born and educated in Tourcoing. It seems sad that he should be posted to his home-town now. I sent him off for a couple of hours to see if he could locate any of his friends; but they'd mostly evacuated themselves.

May 14th

THE weather remains brilliantly fine.

The Germans are allowing the B.E.F. to move into its battle positions almost without interference.

There's a little machine-gunning on the roads.

Britten of Corps had four bombs dropped close to him by a German bomber. He threw himself into a ditch for safety and, when he lifted his head again, was spattered with spent cartridges from a British fighter.

The Belgians are reported to be cracking.

A French light-armoured Division is reported to have moved into Holland at a rate of 25 m.p.h. and to have caught the Germans a good knock.

The R.A.F. propaganda is going full blast.

I move to-morrow.

May 15th

U^P AT 3.

I slept in the office. It was lucky I did, as my F.S.P. all failed to wake up.

We set out at 4—a very small cavalcade. I travelled with Peachy Byrne in his liaison car. Baird, Green and Gandy followed on motor-bicycles. The rest of the section is already in Belgium.

Up to the last moment I'd hoped for a car of my own, but G.H.Q. wouldn't play. They insisted on written authority from Corps. Corps are now in Brussels and gladly gave telephonic authority. And our C.R.A.S.C. sent an officer down to collect the car. But all that wasn't good enough for G.H.Q. They still insisted on their written authority. Even in an emergency—and I imagine this to be an emergency—red-tape prevails.

The road was quite clear. All refugee traffic has been side-tracked. The route-regulation people seem to have done their job well. There were scarcely any signs of war. A few peasants stared at us glumly. They didn't seem in the least pleased to see us. I suppose there's not much to choose really between an army

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which is advancing with the high moral purpose of defending you and an army which is advancing with the low moral purpose of blowing you up. Both look much alike.

The immediate difference between Belgium and France is astonishing. Belgium is in every way cleaner and tidier than France. The villages are better planned. And the roads are far better built. I hadn't realised this before.

The Germans have bombed Alost. Whole streets have been wiped out. There was a large hole just between the bridge and the railway-station. A bomb must have missed both objectives by only a few feet.

As we approached Brussels the scene changed abruptly. There were no more British traffic police to be seen. And the mix-up was indescribable. Half Belgium appeared to be on the move. I've never seen such a queer collection of vehicles. The Belgian Army and the Belgian police seemed to be evacuating themselves as purposefully as the civilian population. The roads into France are temporarily closed to refugees, so their destination is obscure. When we stopped to ask the way or to find out how things were going, everyone—including Belgian soldiers—said:

'We're getting out as quick as possible. The Germans are coming.'

This attitude rather took us aback.

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We found our Divisional area chock-full of troops of all sizes and shapes. There appears to have been a muddle. Two Belgian Divisions are already billeted in the area allotted to us. And they refuse to move. The King of the Belgians has persistently declined to have Staff talks with the French and British. As a result there is no co-ordination whatever between his Army and ours. I suppose it will all straighten itself out in time.

We struggled with difficulty to Divisional Headquarters, which are in a glorified suburb of Brussels called Strombeek-Bever.

Our forward brigades are already in position along the Wavre-Louvain line.

To our horror, we found the whole of Headquarters lumped together in an enormous school on top of a hill overlooking Brussels. It was the only building available. The two Belgian Divisions had very sensibly decided it was too vulnerable for them.

The school is quite beautiful. It is modern. The classrooms are on three floors. They are light and cheerful, and all have huge plate-glass windows. The school is equipped to teach everything from laundry to botany. If it is at all representative of Belgian education, I don't really see how a German occupation will be very beneficial.

Our office is the Second Form classroom. It has only recently been abandoned. There are flowers still on the teacher's desk.

On the walls are gay railway-posters.

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Our exposed position makes us a certain target for every kind of German missile. But the view of Brussels is magnificent.

As my F.S.P. came in I sat them down, one by one, at desks in the classroom and made them write letters home.

Then I went down for breakfast in a local café.

The news is shocking. Queen Wilhelmina is in England. And the Dutch are folding up. It makes me shiver to think of all those Dutch ports in German hands.

On my way up the hill after breakfast I nearly had my ear clipped off by the wing of a German reconnaissance 'plane which was tearing along very low and at a great speed, trying to get away from two Hurricanes. We shot off rifles and pistols at it: but without success. Later we heard that the Hurricanes had brought it down.

The area is thick with enemy agents. We have posted special guards all round Headquarters. Reports come in hourly saying that the signallers are having their telephone-wires cut as soon as they're laid.

At midday the two airmen from the 'plane that was shot down were brought in by a guard from an A/T regiment. I took them over to Corps for interrogation. They were rather impressive. They were both

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Warrant Officers who'd had six years' ground service. They were good-looking and well mannered and knew their job thoroughly. They weren't the undersized, half-starved lunatics we'd been led to expect.

All the prisoners so far taken are violently Nazi in outlook. They say that Hitler is a man of destiny and that everything he does is intuitive and right. What do 100,000 casualties matter so long as he achieves his purpose?

I am billeted on an exceedingly old woman who has sons and grandsons and great-grandsons in the Belgian Army. She invited me to tea and gave me Chivers' strawberry jam. The pot dated, I think, from the last War; but it was a moving gesture.

I ventured into Brussels in the evening. The inhabitants were very gay and friendly. Brussels I imagine to be pro-Ally. But then Brussels is much more cosmopolitan than any other Belgian city.

The first time I ever saw Brussels was in 1919. I stayed there with my father, who had come over to Belgium to take charge of the reconstruction of Dinant after the War. We had already done a tour of the battlefields. And I had taken photographs of Westend and Nieuport and of the old *Vindictive* in

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Ostend harbour. We stayed in Brussels at the Metro-pole. We had dinner at the *filet de sole*. We had sole cooked in white wine followed by chicken and then by *pêche melba*. I was sick all night. Next morning, to cheer me up, my father took me a round of all the Brussels stamp-shops. I remember he bought me a set of German stamps which had been overprinted for use in Poland and then re-overprinted by the Poles when they pushed the Germans out. I was thirteen years old at the time.

May 16th

I HAD two sad little letters from Mary this morning. This new turn of the War must be desperately worrying for everyone in England.

Louvain has been evacuated. And refugees are pouring past. It seems likely that the Germans will try to pass their own agents through disguised as refugees. We are examining all papers very carefully.

One old man with a bicycle said that he'd done the same journey twenty-five years ago on the same bicycle, but in half the time.

Several Flemish-speaking peasants, arrested by the Belgians for suspicious behaviour, turned up under guard in my office. I took them down to Corps. They screamed like animals when their eyes were bandaged. One of them fell on his knees and began to recite prayers and had to be dragged along. He was probably quite innocent. But he behaved as if he thought he ought to be shot.

Corps have left their Security section behind. I'm lending them Allan and French. French speaks a little Flemish. Nobody else seems to.

I lunched in the Corps Mess. The Corps 'G' office

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is functioning in a reassuringly casual manner. You'd never think that there were Germans blowing off guns a very few miles away. The food was excellent. And there was a large selection of drink. The Mess is in a comfortable agricultural college in the old Exhibition grounds. It's, if anything, more vulnerable than our own Divisional Headquarters.

After lunch I went and fought another battle for my car. But, as usual, I lost it.

The situation map in the Intelligence Office is getting most alarming. I sat and watched it, fascinated, as the movement of the German push was chalked in. The break-through at Sedan seems to have been completely successful. And now there's another one beginning higher up. The German Armoured Divisions must be travelling at a tremendous pace. I wonder what the French are going to do. They anticipated that the attack would come exactly when and where and as it has come. So I imagine that they have guns placed one behind the other all the way from Sedan to Paris. I hope they have.

The General was not impressed by the break-through. He put on four pairs of spectacles and stared at it calmly for a minute or two. Then he rubbed it out.

'It hasn't been confirmed,' he said.

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The Field Cashier arrived this afternoon, and we all diligently changed our French money into Belgian. The food in Brussels is famous. I hope we'll get a chance of trying some of it. We'd almost eaten and drunk Lille dry.

There's been a lot of aerial activity all day. The fights over Brussels have been as good as a football match. The whole Division watched them perilously through our big plate-glass windows. The best fight was one in which three Messerschmitts and a Hurricane were brought down.

A large bomb was dropped about three hundred yards away near the railway-station.

Late at night we were told to move back. This order came as a great surprise. We know that the B.E.F. is fighting well. In fact, only this afternoon our next-door Division made a successful counter-attack and recaptured Louvain. The conclusion is that the Sedan break-through has been sustained and that the B.E.F. must fall back in line with the French.

It's very unsatisfactory to be living without news.

The British Consul has left Brussels. An English-woman came into the office this morning, distracted. She has no proper papers and was assured only two days ago by the Consul that there was no need for her to move. And now the last train has left without her. We sent her back to Lille on an empty supply-truck.

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It seems appalling to be abandoning Brussels.

The Belgian troops stand about apathetically at street-corners or sit in pubs. They don't look desperately anxious to fight.

I got a lift in the cipher-truck. We left Strombeek at midnight and were soon in a three-deep, five-mile traffic jam just outside Brussels. We sat there for a couple of hours at least before it cleared. There was a full moon and not a cloud in the sky. Brussels was burning gaily. German bombers had started an enormous fire in a flour-mill, and the flames from it lit up the whole sky for miles round. We sat in our traffic jam, a perfect target, and wondered why nobody came and dropped bombs on us. The cipher-truck driver came from Argyllshire. We gossiped about Scotland, occasionally lighting pipes, which the military police yelled at us to put out.

May 17th

WE REACHED a very sleepy little village, called Wambek, at about 3 in the morning. I am billeted on the *curé*. There are only two houses of any size in the village. One is inhabited by the *curé* and his *gouvernante* and a string of little orphan girls. The other's a beautiful, dilapidated old country-house with a moat round it and creepers climbing all over it. There's also a pretty church made of deep red Flemish brick.

My F.S.P. are sleeping in a hay-loft.

I was woken up at 6 by a series of appalling explosions. I thought we were being bombed to bits. But it turned out to be only the Brussels bridges being blown. The sappers are not leaving this job to chance or to the Belgians. When the Belgians blow a bridge there's a great deal of fuss and a great deal of preparation, followed by a feeble little rattle in the middle of the bridge.

A brigadier was blown right off his feet when we blew the main Brussels bridge. He landed on his seat in the middle of the road.

I shall learn in time to distinguish between the sounds of bombs dropping, of A/A guns firing and of bridges being blown. The golden rule is that the only bomb which matters is the bomb you don't hear.

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As soon as it was light I sent my wretched F.S.P. out to check passes and clear the area for Division. Fortunately we're well off the main road. There are very few refugees. A couple of ancient barouches got stuck in the lane going past the church. They were driven by Dickensian coachmen. Out of one of them peeped a small boy with a thin pale face. In the shadows behind him I could dimly see white hair and jet and bugles nodding. We helped the barouches off the road as quickly as possible. The occupants didn't protest. They were too tired for speech. It struck me that they must have got side-tracked on this road on their way out of Paris during the French Revolution.

Corps have also moved and are now irretrievably lost. I sent off a police-car with three suspects in it early this morning. It returned seven hours later—with the suspects—having failed to find Corps.

One of the suspects was a fat Portuguese Jew. He'd been caught last night trying to put dynamite under a bridge. When challenged by a patrol he seized a rifle and tried to fight his way out. He was only captured after he'd been pretty severely knocked about. But he continued to bite and kick and swear. So we trussed him up like a bull. He's probably a madman.

Units have sent me a constant stream of suspects all day. Corps have disappeared. And there are no French or Belgian authorities to appeal to. So I'm forced to take entire responsibility for the wretched people brought in. Most of them have committed no more

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serious crime than that of possessing a Hungarian or even a Luxembourg passport which was unfamiliar to the British officer who happened to stop them.

I haven't seen an aeroplane of any kind all day.

All the beer has been stolen from 'B' Mess truck—presumably by 'B' Mess servants. The R.E. Liaison Officer, Sauerwein, helped us restock. Sauerwein's a good friend of mine. He's an Alfred de Vigny soldier. He belongs to a cavalry regiment, and this entitles him to wear spurs, tight trousers, a narrow-waisted coat and a tall blue hat. He has a high forehead and Victorian curly hair. He was at Oxford. He speaks absolutely perfect English. He's almost too good to be true.

I climbed the church tower after lunch to look for spies, but found none.

I came down to find our *padré* being hearty to the *curé* in very bad French. The *curé*, who's an ancient and learned man, seemed surprised.

The attitude of the parsons and the doctors towards venereal disease is interesting. The doctors write high-minded pamphlets, saying it's due to the low moral outlook and lack of self-control of the troops. The parsons say it's bad luck.

MY FIRST WAR

A peculiar Englishman was brought in this afternoon under arrest. He wore battle-dress and shoes and had a small forage-cap perched on the top of his head. He was a civilian. He told a harrowing story. It seems that he and the Military Attaché were left to clear up the mess after the Ambassador had left. They worked feverishly for twenty-four hours, burning everything in sight. Finally, just for luck, they blew up the power-station. They then discovered, to their horror, that the bridges had gone and that the Germans were advancing. So the Military Attaché gave him a battle-dress and told him to fling himself on the mercy of the British Army. The British Army promptly arrested him.

It was impossible to corroborate his story. But I took a chance on him. I had him fed and tidied up and put on a supply-truck and sent to Lille. I hope to God he isn't a spy.

We're on the move again tonight. It seems our withdrawal wasn't decisive enough. Corps cavalry are covering a further move back. I'm getting a bit sick of living in this unsettled way.

May 18th

ANOTHER interim day. I arrived late last night after an exhausting drive at Resegem, where no billets had been found for us. I slept on the stone floor of the outhouse of a farm with my section. I envied them their ten years' juniority. I'm not exactly old. But my reflexes are more deliberate than theirs. They were all asleep in ten minutes and snoring like hubble-bubbles. I, on the other hand, lay awake for hours.

We were again rigged up in the local school. But this time it was a very lowly school. Although I spent only a few hours there, I shall always remember it. There were just two classrooms. One was so full of little growing plants as to be a sort of conservatory. The other had only blackboards and some gentle Victorian drawings illustrating decorum.

In Resegem we hit the stream of refugees. They poured through the village all day long. I was surprised at the number of priests who are on the move. They aren't the best-quality priests. They stand stodgily at street-corners and tell their beads or read little Bibles while the women-folk who accompany them make enquiries on their behalf about food and lodging.

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We've developed a Belgian Liaison Officer. He's rather a nice, toothy man, in civilian life a secondary school-teacher. By some miracle he has a car. He also has a chauffeur, an effeminate young man who wears a forage-cap with a long tassel on it. He joins in all conversations and screeches with laughter at the idea of his being a soldier.

Gandy and Green, while out checking papers, were machine-gunned by a German 'plane. They came home jittering.

When the Germans first attacked, the Belgian authorities rounded up all German citizens, whether refugees or not. They took away their papers and incarcerated them in Brussels. Later they released them all in a great hurry. But they lost all their papers. So now we have on the roads a flood of Germans, without papers, speaking no language but German, most of them running like fun from persecution. It's my job to sift the genuine ones from the frauds. It's an impossibility of course. I tried to get Belgian help. But I have discovered that there's not a single Belgian authority—soldier, policeman, town councillor—functioning within miles. I spent two hours trying to find a police-station on which I could unload some German Jews. But there is no police-station.

The sun is very strong.

My back aches through running to and fro.

I bought up a lot of Côte d'Or chocolate this morning. It may be useful as our meals get rarer and rarer.

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Later in the day we got yet another order to retire. The Division moved out at about midday with a lot of fuss and noise.

After they'd gone a strange unearthly silence settled down on Resegem. I waited till last—partly to clear up and partly because there was no car except Colonel Arnott's to take me. I sat in the plant-filled classroom with Arnott and the D.A.A.G. and the D.A.Q.M.G. We couldn't move until a runner came in to say that the Divisional cavalry was safely across the river. The village was empty. No guns sounded. There was no telephone left. A blue-bottle buzzed. At any minute we expected one of the German advanced armoured cars to come rattling down the street. It was a queer gap in the War. I spent the time trying to learn Flemish from a children's grammar and drawing a picture of Queen Victoria on the blackboard.

At last—after about two hours—the runner arrived and gave us the O.K. I set off with Arnott and a large and more than usually inaccurate map.

We lost our way at once.

We drove across fields and down farm-tracks. We got caught up among the hordes of refugees. We

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drove north and south and east and west. And still the main Audenarde road eluded us.

Eventually we reached Sottegem, where we found a reconstruction company which put us on our right road. They were glad to see us. They were amazed to know we were retreating. In fact, they were under the impression that they were at least forty miles behind the front line. It was sad to have to disillusion them.

In Audenarde an agitated 2nd Lieutenant informed us that our location had been changed and that we are now part of another Corps. Our new location is Sweveghem.

Audenarde has been bombed.

We sniffed at the Escaut, which seemed a curiously inadequate ditch behind which to fight a decisive battle. The Germans have revolutionised our ideas of tank obstacles. It would take a river at least the width of the North Sea to stop a modern German tank.

We arrived at Sweveghem at 6. It's a straggling industrial town-village. Thanks to the changed movement order, we were the first Divisional officers to arrive. And so it fell to our lot to billet the Division. It's never a pleasant job. And it wasn't made easier by the swarms of refugees who'd already packed themselves into every available corner.

But I had a bit of luck. I find I know the Mayor. He's a man called Bekaers. He's President of the Belgian steel cartel. His firm's one of the biggest manufacturers of barbed-wire in the world. It's in

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his house that Victor often stayed on his steel-buying expeditions. And in 1937 Mary and I pushed him and his wife round the Coronation, which they attended as the guests of the British steel cartel.

It's a small world.

Bekaers made things easy for us. He has a lovely millionaire's house, which he has put at the disposal of 'A' Mess and in which he's prepared to billet all our senior officers. The General is sleeping in a beautiful panelled room with a bath.

The rest of the Divisional officers are equally luxurious.

May 19th

THE centre of Sweveghem is a big square with a big modern church in it. Round or near the church are all our Divisional offices and Messes. It will be a hot spot once the enemy gets the range.

I've been sitting practically all day on the church wall in the middle of the square. Our movement orders have been so conflicting that I thought it best to turn myself into an information bureau.

We've set up our office in the *Mairie*.

It's Sunday. And in spite of the War and the danger a tremendous crowd turned up to Mass all dressed in its Sunday best. In the vaults below the church the priests have put straw. And here the sick refugees are resting.

Monsieur and Madame Bekaers left by car for Ostend this evening to rejoin the Belgian Government. He's a prominent industrialist and feels it's his duty to be where he's most needed. He's left a considerable sum of money for the sick and the poor. It's being administered by the local priest, who's staying behind, and by the local doctor, who's a really grand old fellow. The nuns have gone. Out of a whole flock there's only the Mother Superior and a few servant-nuns left. It's been necessary to get local help

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to deal with the eighty odd *infirmes* whom the departed nuns are supposed to be in charge of.

The refugees are everywhere.

The *Mairie* is being stampeded by local inhabitants wanting to get their papers checked. The secretary is here still, but goes quite soon. Nobody in authority in this town—with the exception of the old priest and the old doctor—seems to have the faintest sense of responsibility.

I talked to Madame Bekaers before she went. She's an extraordinarily nice woman, I thought. I wish to God she was staying.

With the departure of the Bekaers I am virtually Military Mayor of Sweveghem.

May 20th

TODAY's been very exhausting.

I was hauled out of bed five times during the night to deal with suspects. The Units are being rather over-zealous. They're so scared of letting an enemy agent through that they arrest all kinds of innocent men.

One of my midnight visitors was an old man who was brought in in a state of complete physical and nervous collapse. He had no papers. He'd been found lying in a ditch outside a battalion headquarters. But it was pretty obvious that he was too far gone to be of much use as a spy. I woke up the M.I. orderlies, who were firmly and uncompromisingly asleep, and had them see to his feet. I took him back to the office, where Gandy got him coffee and food. We let him rest until he'd recovered a bit. Then we set him off on the road to Ostend. We thought we'd done pretty well by him. But his only comment was:

'When I was brought here I had two pairs of spectacles. Now I've only got one. You've stolen the other pair.'

It is difficult to know just who is doing the spying. The Germans have been organising this campaign since September. They have their agents—and these include a great many Belgians—posted everywhere. And almost everyone is under suspicion.

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I've had a lot of announcements translated into Flemish and roneotyped and pinned to the doors of churches and police-stations. I've told people that they'll be shot if they go out at night and arrested if they show lights after dark.

But the Belgian peasant is *entêté*. He'll never pay attention to anything he's told.

Meanwhile the German information service flourishes. Every time there's a move—every time a new gun's brought up into position—a light winks from somewhere. And down come the bombs and shells.

A man who claimed to be a British agent came to call on me this afternoon. He talked intimately of the British Ambassador and Sir Roger Keyes, and produced a two-year-old letter from a private soldier living in Aberdeen inviting him to stay. He was scruffy and under-sized. And his information—concerning Persil packets stacked in shop-windows and Pacha advertisements behind which messages could be slipped—was not new. But it was exciting to see a British agent.

Evacuation is a great problem. The fight moves so fast that what is today a back area may very possibly have become a battlefield by tomorrow. It's difficult to know just what to advise people to do. It seems inhuman to tell them to stay put while guns are firing off in their back-yards. On the other hand, in the long

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run they'd most of them be much better off in their own homes, even under German domination, than in a strange place, separated from their friends and possessions. The better type of Belgian sees this at once. In fact he'd rather be blown up in his own house than leave it. But unfortunately many of the Belgians are a spineless lot. They bolt at the first sound of gunfire.

I don't feel much sympathy for most of the evacuees. I can understand Jews and Austrians and Czechs and Cabinet Ministers and anti-Nazi journalists doing their best to get out of Belgium. But what on earth are the Germans going to find time to do to children of four or bed-ridden old women of eighty? These people have an exaggerated idea of their own importance. What's more, they're going to be an infernal nuisance to the French charitable organisations.

Needless to say, there are no Belgian charitable organisations. Indeed, there's no organisation here at all so far as I can see.

A large detachment of Belgian troops—with a disproportionately large number of officers—has been billeted on Sweveghem since we arrived here. It moved out this afternoon, rather secretively, having avoided all fighting, work and responsibility with complete success.

Meanwhile this office has life-and-death powers over the civilian population. It seems absurd. After all, we're only a Security section. But the whole Divi-

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sional Staff is absorbed in matters of great military importance. And there's no one else available.

It's queer to think that, when we first came into Belgium, we couldn't imagine how we were going to employ our time.

Every kind of extraordinary character has been through the office during the course of the day.

A Belgian architect from Namur was brought in four times by four different patrols because of his suspicious behaviour. I think he was a little off his head. He said he'd been called up and was looking for his regiment. But when we asked him what his regiment was he said we were spies. He was eventually pushed off gently in the direction of Courtrai murmuring:

'Quelle aventure.'

Then there was a motherly German woman who had no papers of any kind and no money. She didn't seem to be worrying. She sat down in the office and gossiped away happily about her family, which had been evacuated to Australia. When we suggested that she should move, she burst into tears and said:

'Why can't I stay? I'm so happy here. I could be so useful to you.'

More serious was the young man with a wild eye and a beautiful, Christlike beard, who was brought in because he'd been climbing into one of our billets in

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the middle of the night. His story was that he'd come to visit his wife. This sounded so improbable that I sent a man to check up on him with his neighbours. They said, oh, yes, his wife did live at the billet, but he'd tried to cut her throat the week before, and she was still recuperating. The young man swore that he only wanted to apologise. His wife, on the other hand, was confident that he'd come to finish her off.

One woman arrived with a car and a load of children and demanded that we find her someone who'd drive it as far as Ostend. She didn't want a Flemish chauffeur. She said:

'I'd sooner be bayoneted by Germans than driven by a Flem.'

One man had been taken out of his cart for being without papers. His wife and family had been left in the cart. And now the Germans are in possession of the village where the cart was left; and so he is separated from his family.

Most of the problems are made more difficult by the fact that none of us here speaks Flemish. And very few of the local people speak anything else. The majority of them are simple folk. Their troubles could be handled quite easily by someone who knows them, speaks their language and can check up on their behaviour.

My F.S.P. have taken it in turns to handle this mass of unfamiliar business and have handled it with wonderful patience. They're an adaptable crowd.

May 21st

C.R.A.S.C. has at last got me a car. It's an old Army Vauxhall. The doors don't fit and the engine gurgles. But it's a car.

The C.O. of one of our Home Counties regiments had breakfast in the Mess. He said that his men had done the enemy a lot of damage and were most reluctant to retreat. On principle, he told us, he always explains to his men the general lay-out of a battle. They like to be kept in the picture. But our present withdrawal takes a lot of explaining.

I have nowhere to detain suspects. It looks as though I may have to have them either shot or released.

G.H.Q. have sent round a long instruction the gist of which is that great care must be taken not to detain Belgian nationals without getting the co-operation of the Belgian authorities. In extreme cases Belgian nationals may be detained; but the Belgian authorities must then immediately be informed. There fol-

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lows a list of Belgian *agents de sûreté*. I can't believe that G.H.Q. are fighting the same War as we are.

The water and the electric power failed this morning. Apparently the manager of the power-station suddenly panicked and shut off everything without warning. He then told us that it would take him four hours and a hundred men to get the thing started again. Our sappers took charge. And in an hour, by some wizardry, the full service was restored.

I went to see the Mayor of Courtrai. I was authorised by Division to assure him that we wouldn't blow any bridges without letting him know. He told me that a special request had come through from the King of the Belgians that the power-station at Sweveghem should not be destroyed, even if the alternative was that it should fall into German hands. This struck me as odd.

The Mayor of Courtrai's a grand little man. He has the situation in his area well in hand. His police have vanished. But he has organised a volunteer force to take their place. The normal population of Courtrai is 40,000. The refugees have augmented it to 150,000. The Mayor says he can house and feed the whole lot for a minimum of three weeks.

There are no British troops billeted in Courtrai. But stray officers keep on coming in and asking the Mayor for help of one kind or another. I left him

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four F.S.P. He said he'd be glad of their services. He has no liaison at present with the British.

The local shopkeepers are enjoying their trade boom. They seemed gay and friendly. They spoke with enthusiasm of the British and said that they were confident that the Germans would never cross the Escaut.

The outside of the Town Hall is being used as a sort of post office by the refugees. They stick little messages for each other all over it. I suddenly realised the desperate precariousness of a refugee's life. Once they've left home—with their bicycles and bedding and bird-cages—they're venturing into the unknown. And if they lose a wife or a child, they have no means of ever finding them again. The impulse of fear must be very powerful.

It is significant that no one ever flees towards Germany.

I went into France and had lunch at our new Corps H.Q. The G2 is a nice man who was lecturing at Minley when I was there. The rest of the cast seemed a bit amateurish after our own admirable Corps. Arthur Marshall has turned up there as Security Officer. Their headquarters are at Roncq, in a château pleasantly remote from the War. The G2 has had his billet, which is a pub, donated to him by the owner, who's evacuating himself.

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Later I drove in to Courtrai again with Colonel Stockdale and helped him requisition a house and park for his Field Workshop. It took a bit of doing. The owner's brother-in-law had already stuffed the house full of his friends and relations. And the park was littered with gipsies. We had to turn them out and find alternative accommodation for them. This caused a good deal of chat. In the middle of it there was suddenly an appalling air-raid. We lay on the lawn under a tree while the bombs thundered all round us. It was a horrible experience. I hadn't been in a proper air-raid since 1918—when I was twelve years old—and I'd rather forgotten what they were like. We picked ourselves up eventually and went home. We found my batman up a lamp-post. He'd taken to heart a statement of mine that bombs burst flat along the ground and seldom blast anything more than five feet off it.

A peculiarity of the Courtrai air-raids is that the bombs never start dropping until the All Clear has been sounded.

We felt a bit shaken. We took ourselves back to the Mess and opened a bottle of champagne. As we did so a howitzer shell whistled over the roof and landed with a crash in the garden. The enemy must at last have got his guns up. I went out and ordered my F.S.P. to withdraw from the exposed office in the *Mairie*.

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It's now fairly obvious that Sweveghem is going to be bombarded. The General has given orders that the town is to be evacuated of all refugees. Only its inhabitants have the option of staying on.

I went round every house this evening with the Provost Officer clearing out refugees. It was a horrid task. The very sick ones we let stay on. The little doctor is guaranteeing to look after them. The rest picked themselves up wearily and stumbled off towards Courtrai.

Most of the remaining inhabitants intend to remain. Their courage is magnificent and very moving. Some of the women had a real light of battle in their eyes. They were shocked at the idea of the Germans bombarding their homes, but quite confident that we'd soon drive them away.

May 22nd

I SPENT last night with my section in a little abandoned house they've found. Its owners, before they left, had bundled all their bedding—pillows, blankets, mattresses, eiderdowns—into the cellar. The cellar floor was just an immense bed. Here we slept—all together—in an insanitary heap.

I woke up at 4. The shelling had stopped. And there was complete silence. I had a horrid feeling that the Division had moved out in the night and forgotten to tell us. I got up and walked down the street in my pyjamas with a revolver. There was no one in sight. I walked about a quarter of a mile before I came across a sleepy sentry outside the 'G' office. He looked at me in surprise. On my way back I passed a very old man singing to himself as he prodded his cow into a field.

I went again into Courtrai.

My F.S.P. there have set up an office and found themselves billets with a charming old chemist. They've also requisitioned another car—a Packard. So we're truly mobile at last.

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I had lunch with my opposite number in the next Division. He has a scheme for putting himself and Arthur Marshall under my orders and making a big Corps pool section. We'd have our Headquarters in Courtrai. It seems a good idea. If—as we hope—we're really making a stand on the Escaut, Courtrai is the obvious pivot for our sort of work.

We're rounding up Nazi sympathisers still. The local police did a splendid job of work in arresting the local Nazi number one on May the 10th. But it's been left to F.S.P. to search his office and find a dossier which incriminates a great many people. We're at last on a good trail.

Mingay is back. We hadn't expected to see him again this War. He was on leave when we moved into Belgium. And it's taken him a long time to find us. Apparently there were about 1,000 men all looking for their Units. They formed themselves into a brigade and marched through France. Mingay says the muddle everywhere was appalling. The French were evacuating like madmen. It was dreadful to see how callously they were abandoning their homes and even their animals. Everywhere the picture was the same: unmilked cows, song-birds dead in their cages, rabbits starving in their hutches, dogs and cats shut in back rooms. The English soldier is a sentimental creature. At every village it came to, the motley bri-

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gade fell out and didn't fall in again until it had set free all the animals it could lay its hands on.

When I got home I was stupefied to find that we're again moving. The Belgian Army Corps on our left has melted away and we have lost all the guns we sent them to bolster them up.

The military situation is obscure. It is reported that the German Armoured Divisions have reached the sea. This seems fantastic news. And it is not confirmed. I imagine that soon the French will exert pressure and break the German encircling band. It's absurd that four—or even eight—German Divisions should be able to surround the B.E.F., the French Northern Army and the whole Belgian Army. Meanwhile it is painfully true that the Germans are sitting on our lines of communication. We've had no supplies for three days.

I put Baird and Mingay and our movable stuff into the Packard and convoyed them into France through Halluin. I thought I'd better make quite sure they got through the barrier, as the car has no military number-plates. My old friend, the *douanier-lieutenant*, Fournie, waved them past with a wink.

The French frontier is open again to Belgian refugees. We've done our best to shoo them up towards Ostend. But they seem to prefer France.

Mingay says he's a Jonah. Every town he's slept in

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for the last ten days has been bombed. I've been lucky about bombing so far. Yesterday's raid in Courtrai was my first.

I had an ice with my batman in a café in Courtrai on my way through.

I hate leaving this town. The inhabitants haven't the faintest idea we're going. And, of course, I'm not allowed to tell them. I bought some grape-fruit and a little coffee. I don't like to buy too much, as I know they'll soon be short themselves. One shopkeeper said he was expecting big stocks of something or other soon from Brussels. I hadn't realised how ignorant everyone is here of the real situation.

Bekaers has returned.

I had a long talk with him. He appears to have missed the Belgian Government at Ostend. And he couldn't get through to Calais. So he thought he'd better come back. He'd had a nightmare drive. Both he and his wife were in a state of collapse. He told me that outside Ypres there is a five-mile block of refugee cars which have been there for two days. I suggested that he should come on into France with us. But he wasn't sure if he would. He said that his people had received him home as if he was a saviour. He thought it was his duty to stay with them. I left him still undecided. He's a good and courageous man. And I wish him well.

He offered us his cellar. And we filled our Mess trucks with his fine burgundy and claret. He said he'd rather we had it than that the Germans should. The

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G.I. took this offer literally and pickaxed all that we couldn't carry. This seemed to me a bit vandalistic. It's like breaking the springs of the beds so that the Germans shan't sleep on them.

Our new location is Werwicq Sud. It's on the French frontier, just inside France. We appear to be going to stand on the defence line we so carefully prepared all through the winter.

By the time I arrived, Child had made friends with a local policeman and I found the Section snugly settled into a little house in the main street.

May 23rd

THIS place is a little paradise. From my billet I can see right into Belgium. Werwicq is one of the few green places in the North of France. I remember months ago suggesting to Baker that he should write some scandalous War memoirs and call them *From My Window in Werwicq*. Well, here's the window.

I came down early to breakfast.

Again we've outstripped the Germans. And there was no sound of gunfire. The sun was already hot. We're eating on the terrace of our villa. The Mess servants had got the radio to work. It was playing a Mozart string quartet which mingled well with the splashing of the fountains in the garden.

After breakfast all the light and power failed—just as they had done at Sweveghem. I was sent hurrying round to see what was the matter.

The efficient young woman secretary of the *Mairie* tried to explain. It seems that the company responsible for the power has farmed its responsibility out to a second company, which, in its turn, has got mixed up with a third company. The complicated arrangement works all right in peace-time. But someone—

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some unmentionable 'one'—has taken advantage of the present situation to default on certain payments. And so the precarious edifice has crashed. I wrote out a chit saying that it was the wish of the Commander-in-Chief that the power should at once recommence. And, by God, in an hour's time it did.

After this first success I thought I'd better see what else I could do. So I summoned a village council for two o'clock.

Sauerwein came to support me. His beautiful cavalry uniform added glory to the proceedings.

The Mayor wasn't present. He'd found it mysteriously necessary to go to St. Pol a week ago on urgent business. And he hasn't been heard of since.

But the adjoint was there. He's the local butcher. And the council also mustered the baker, the priest, a carpenter, a farmer and four nondescript elderly men. This is a good deal better than anything Belgium could produce.

There was an air-raid warning just as we started. We discussed local affairs to the sound of A/A firing and of an occasional bomb.

The situation is clear. Our supplies aren't coming through. And the B.E.F. is going to have to buy or requisition a good deal of local stuff. We want to cause as little inconvenience as possible to the local inhabitants. So I suggested that the council should make a census of flour, coal, cattle and, of course, population. Then supplies can be evenly distributed. The local people can have what they need. The B.E.F.

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can requisition the surplus—beginning with cattle abandoned by evacuees—and the refugees can be fed out of what is left over.

This idea seems sensible to our C.R.A.S.C., who's in charge of local supply.

So far as bread is concerned, I'm told that the B.E.F. has taken over the big bakery in Lille and is having stuff baked there.

The beast-slaughtering arrangements are very hazy.

Our 'G' office is in a vast white château in the middle of a field. It can be seen for miles. You'd think that any airman would drop a bomb on it on principle—even without knowing it was the Divisional 'G' office. Perhaps there is cunning in such audacity.

I drove over to Corps, whose cunning has exceeded even ours. They are settling in at 'Plug Street' in a farm-house with a total housing capacity of five men and a child. Their parking-place is a dried-up swamp. You have to put your car in first gear and take a running jump to clear the three-foot drop that leads into it. They are morbidly surrounded by the graves of the last War. The farmer, who's still there, is a well-known Flamingant and pro-Nazi.

No one can say that the modern Staff officer lacks initiative.

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I fixed up with the G2 a provisional plan for a big F.S.P. Corps section.

I met Arthur Marshall, looking well and industrious. I cannot imagine any man less suited to fighting in a war than Arthur. But he seems to have adapted himself perfectly.

It's a truism that unexpected people make good soldiers. I'm told, for example, that Ernest Thesiger was an exemplary private in the last War. He was also the only man in the British Army who habitually did *petit point* in a front-line trench.

I went with Sauerwein to Ypres. Officially we were trying to get some firearms from the *conciergerie*. But, in fact, I wanted to see the Cloth Hall before it's blown up again.

I bought a sack of coffee for our Mess and another sack for our village councillors, who are very short of it. The big grocery in the main square was full of stores. I noticed, however, that it is already impossible to get pork or ham in or out of a tin. And you can't really get far on tinned peas and mushrooms.

May 24th

AN INSTRUCTION has just reached me from the B.C.R. It was sent out about a week ago. It says that all German Jews with a red J (instead of the usual black J) on their passports must be detained. The Germans have apparently issued a number of red J passports to their own agents. This raises enormous problems. I tremble to think how many red Js I've already allowed through.

I've discovered some beautiful old Calvados in the cellar of our new Mess.

We had a second council meeting today. Werwicq is only too thankful to co-operate with us. I'm leaving Hand permanently in the *Mairie*. He's going to be liaison between the village and the British. The census is progressing quite smoothly. The baker now has British authority to refuse to serve refugees until he's quite sure that his own regular customers have been satisfied.

Communications even with Lille have broken

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down. The *préfet du nord* is supposed to be handling and co-ordinating all food problems for his area. But, of course, he isn't.

Cellars in the big houses in Roubaix and Tourcoing have been got ready in case it's found necessary to evacuate any of the frontier villages.

A pretty middle-aged Austrian woman spent the night in our office. She had no money. And her feet had given out completely. We did all we could to find a hospital to put her in. But there is no hospital.

I went over to the Petrol Company to get some petrol and stayed to tea in their Mess. They've settled themselves into a superb new road-house. While I was there two French Staff officers came in. They had orders to requisition this particular road-house for the French I^e Région, which is at present at Bailleul. They too stayed to tea. I was glad of an opportunity of finding out how the War is going from the French point of view. They said that everything was now set for the great Battle of Cambrai, which would settle things one way or the other. Either the French would be able to break through the slender German line and make contact with the British, or they wouldn't. If they were successful, the Germans would be caught

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like bees in a bottle and would buzz away until they died or were mopped up. If they were not successful, we might as well pack up. I asked them what they thought of the prospects. The elder of the two considered for a moment and then said:

'Il ne faut pas désespérer.'

I should like to place it on record that that is the most optimistic statement I have ever heard made by a French Staff officer on any subject whatever.

May 25th

WE'VE been moved back again to our old Corps. I went over to Armentières to see Geoffrey Cass, but couldn't find him. Armentières has been bombed hourly all day. And everyone looked a little dazed.

A red J arrived in the office this afternoon. I determined to make a test case of him. So I took him in a car to Lille. He was a nondescript little man. There was nothing in particular to be said either for or against him. He was just a red J.

The roads were practically clear of refugees. I don't know where they've all got to.

There were very few people about in Lille. I went to the B.C.R. The house was shut up. A woman leaned out of a window opposite and informed me that the whole outfit had departed a week ago. I tried the Citadelle, but had no better luck. I finally attacked the Préfecture. Three-quarters of the vast building was shut. The other quarter resembled an ants' nest into which someone has just poured some petrol. There was a terrific coming and going. A gang of rather drunken policemen was at the door. They didn't know where the Prefect was. They'd never

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heard of the B.C.R. They weren't interested in the 1^e Région. They wouldn't any of them touch my red J. But they all clustered round him and shook their fists at him because his eyes were bandaged and he was therefore presumably a spy. I went inside. There was nobody in any of the rooms. Little groups of people stood chattering excitedly in the passages. They wouldn't pay any attention to me. I saw an arrow which pointed to the office of Captain Baker. I followed it and several similar arrows up two flights of stairs. The arrows then began to waver. Finally they took me all the way downstairs again. I stopped two young men dressed like officers in the Italian Navy. One of them put his hand over my mouth to prevent me speaking to him. The other ran away. I stopped a typist and took her by both shoulders and shook her. Then I asked her where I could find Captain Baker. She said she hadn't the faintest idea. So I went out again. I gave the head policeman my red J's dossier and handed him over. I said:

'Take him to Captain Baker's office. Keep him there for an hour. At the end of that time, if Captain Baker doesn't turn up, release him.'

The man was so astonished that he agreed.
I now wash my hands of red Js.

Mingay and Carter and I stopped for a drink in the only bar that remained open. The proprietors seemed

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very hopeful about the outcome of the War. Their optimism was shared by an old man who was dancing by himself in the middle of the floor.

'We'll beat them. We'll beat them. We'll beat them,' he said.

Then he sank down into a chair and went to sleep.

We went back through Quesnoy, which is now the Headquarters of the neighbouring Division. A harassed officer stopped me at a barricade and asked me if I could identify some foreigners for him. They turned out to be the advanced road-control officers of a French Division which was coming through Quesnoy later in the day. They certainly looked a bit nondescript.

'Are you sure they're French?' the officer asked.

'Positive,' I said.

'Thank God,' he answered. 'I was afraid they might be the beginning of a Boche column.'

Outside Quesnoy I helped Colonel Cameron to requisition a farm for an emergency clearing-station. The farm was occupied by thirty refugees, who'd calmly taken it over—cows, poultry, grain and all—from its absentee owner. They were very cross at being turned out.

I got back to find that we're moving again. The Belgians have again run away. And now there's a great hole just above us.

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'What's more, we've got nothing to put in it,'
said Henry Straubenzee sadly.

I've seen very little of Henry lately. He's been
practically a prisoner in his office. He looks tired.

May 26th

WE MOVED early this morning.

It's our last move. It must be. There's nowhere else for us to move to. We're now jostling the next-door Division. The whole B.E.F.'s confined within a very small space. I imagine that we're about to face the enemy and fight a tremendous battle.

We have a good supply of food and drink. Allo's just got me a case of whisky left behind by the N.A.A.F.I. What with the whisky and Monsieur Bekaer's red wine and some other bottles looted from our various stopping-places, we have enough alcohol to keep us insensible until long after we've been wiped out.

Linselles is a charming, sleepy old town. The Mayor is still here. Indeed, all the public services seem to be functioning.

My F.S.P. have taken over the doctor's house. It's our best billet up-to-date. It has a garden. It also has a bathroom with hot water. The doctor has only recently been called up. He must have left in a hurry. There are flowers all over the house. And in the nursery toys are strewn about. And everywhere there's the unmistakable fragrance of small babies.

We wondered why we'd been allowed to have such a fine house. We discovered that it's on the crest of a

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hill, the wrong side of the town, facing the enemy. There's a battery each side of us. A German observation balloon was up all the morning. So we may expect a deluge of shells before long.

Meanwhile we're making ourselves comfortable. There's a good solid cellar to which we shall retire when things get too hot for us.

I more or less gave my F.S.P. the day off. Green and Bustard at once rushed for the gramophone and began to play the 5th Symphony of Beethoven. It's a curious thing, but since the serious war began the troops have gone off 'swing.' In the evenings, if there's a radio available, it's not uncommon to find that it's been tuned in to serious classical music, usually from Munich.

Geoffrey Cass called on us. We opened a bottle of champagne in his honour. He was in great form and looking more pugnacious than ever. In time I believe he'll even screw himself up to the point of killing a German.

Mingay and some volunteers are digging an anti-shelling trench. They're working away with all the feverish inconsequence of children digging on the beach at Rhyl.

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A farmer and his family were brought in under escort. They have faulty wiring in their farm and, in consequence, were suspected by the troops billeted on them of signalling to the enemy. I think they were innocent. I reminded the troops that there is a distinction between Frenchmen and Belgians. The family was badly scared. I sent it back home in a car.

I walked down to lunch in our new Mess. The Mess and the 'G' office are combined in a superb tumble-down château hidden away among trees. It's the first well-concealed headquarters we've ever had. For that reason, I suppose, the Germans came and dive-bombed us during lunch. Fortunately they only hit the ornamental water in the park. The château has fine deep cellars in which we should all have been perfectly safe if one of the Mess servants hadn't locked them and gone off with the key.

I spent the afternoon mowing the lawn.

Today is Sunday again. And again the church bells summoned all the population to church. They went—in their best clothes—in spite of the shelling.

The great rivers of refugees on the roads give one the false impression that the whole countryside is moving. It isn't true. The majority of country folk are

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stoical. It's the town folk who are moving. The country folk love their homes and share their misfortunes with them.

This afternoon old women sat as usual in their doorways crocheting and gossiping. And the children played in the streets. They even picked up bits of shell and brought them home as souvenirs. I felt ashamed to be wearing a tin hat. My business here is no more dangerous than theirs.

I think our troops are as philosophical as the country folk. I've talked to all sorts of men in all stages of exhaustion during the last few days. And in all of them the outstanding characteristic appears to be equanimity. They laugh at the Belgians. They're not sure about the French. They treat the Germans with a certain wary scorn. But their feelings are not violent about anyone. They face machine-guns much as they would face very fast bowling.

It is easier to fight a war abroad than at home. When things aren't going too well, the Frenchman or the Belgian has a sneaking temptation to go and see what's happening to his family. It's no use the British troops wondering what's happening to their families.

There's an Army Field Workshop at the bottom of our garden. It's got stranded there. Army Field Workshops are supposed to be at least twenty miles behind the firing-line. So, for that matter, are F.S.P. It's a topsy-turvy war. Who would ever have imagined that G.H.Q. would see German tanks before we did? A

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great many people must be wondering why they were so desperately anxious to get Staff appointments.

I strolled down before dinner and invited the Ordnance Officers to come and share our drinks with us.

At dinner in the Mess I was casually informed that I'd better be moving my men out. Various quasi-noncombatants are departing tonight. And it was suggested that I should go with them.

I summoned my men in a hurry. Baird went down to La Madeleine to get petrol. By nightfall we were lined up in convoy. And at eleven o'clock we stole out of Linselles.

I was sad to be going. I was particularly sad not to be staying and seeing the fight out with Henry. The D.A.A.G., I hope, will be joining us later. He's a man I've grown to like and admire more and more. It's on his authority that I've been allowed to do so many peculiar things.

I have no map. I've been told to go to Furnes. I don't know the road. I'm allowed no light. I can only pray that my usually accurate sense of direction will not betray me.

Our two cars are stuffed with produce.

Behind me follow my F.S.P. on motor-bicycles, the 'G' truck, the 'A and Q' truck, the cipher truck, the 'B Mess' truck, and a score of other vehicles undiscernible in the dark.

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At the last moment the Cipher Officer—an efficient but irritating little man called White—was shoved into my car.

I'm told that we also carry our own surgeon and our own priest.

May 27th

I'M GLAD I haven't a map. I don't in the least want to know how close the Germans are on either side of us. Yesterday, Division captured the papers of a German Staff officer which gave away the whole of the German operation order for today. Division were very pleased with themselves over their capture. I was less enthusiastic. For the operation order showed that the Germans plan to attack the B.E.F. in a pincer movement from Douai and from below Ypres, with Lille as their ultimate objective. It looks as though they've already started. There's been a terrific bombardment all night. Shells have been whizzing overhead. I haven't yet learned to distinguish between our shelling and the Germans'. Perhaps it's just as well.

Progress along this road has been slow. The first ten miles weren't bad. We passed Armentières at about midnight and watched it blazing away. It's been heavily bombed.

Then we ran into a convoy and later into a cavalcade of guns. We passed and repassed some infantry about six times. The infantry will probably reach

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their objective before we do. This is by no means a beaten army. But it's a bewildered army. Since its first trek into Belgium it's done nothing but retire, take up a position, fight and then retire again. It's had no rest at all. And yet I'm sure that, if its officers ordered it to, it would willingly turn back and fight the Germans to the last round of its ammunition.

We spent about five hours just opposite 'Plug Street.'

There's a sort of bottle-neck here. All the roads converge onto our one road.

There aren't any refugees to be seen. Indeed, we haven't been hampered at all by refugee movement. Our military police seem to be a good deal more competent than the French.

We managed to extricate ourselves from the traffic jam at about 6 and made a dash for Furnes.

At dawn the German Air Force spotted us. It came and machine-gunned us as we sat in convoy. And it pursued us all along the road to Furnes.

I dislike being machine-gunned from the air. There's something very undignified about leaping out of a car and flinging yourself into a ditch every ten minutes.

The Germans seem to enjoy hedge-hopping. They land in a field and then nonchalantly skim the hedges and pepper you from point-blank range. And you can't do them much damage with a pistol or a rifle.

We reached Furnes eventually and sat down and waited for Division to catch up with us. We've had

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no very definite orders. In fact, now I come to think of it, we haven't had any orders at all. I parked our trucks carefully down the side of the road under the trees. Then I went off to reconnoitre.

Furnes's about fifteen miles from Dunkirk.

I asked a native if he could tell me the name of a good hotel in Dunkirk, as we're all tired and feel we'd like a wash and a sleep. He looked at me in amazement. I soon discovered why.

I drove along a side road, as the main road is being bombed regularly. It was extremely hot. The Flemish farms and cottages are charming and rather Breughelish. And everything's very green.

There's a mass of Belgian troops about. They looked quite cheerful. Most of them were smoking and singing and playing cards. I presume that they'd just had the news that the King of the Belgians has thrown in his hand.

That sounds a little hard. But really the Belgians have shown very little stomach for the fight. It's true that—with their horse-drawn, 1914 artillery and their totally inadequate Air Force—they didn't stand a chance. And they must have taken a hammering during the first few days of the campaign. But they ought to have done better.

In a way it's a relief that they've packed up. At least now we shan't be expecting them to hold positions which they never meant to hold.

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Dunkirk was a nasty shock. I knew it had been bombed, but I hadn't realised quite how seriously. As I entered the town there was a roar of engines overhead. I looked up and saw about thirty pale-green aeroplanes with a black cross on their underwings flying very low above me. There were no air-raid shelters to be seen. So I dived down a side-street and hid myself under a stone seat. At that moment the bombs began to fall. Each aeroplane dropped a 500-pound screaming bomb. Then they all scattered hundreds of little delayed-action and incendiary bombs, which rained down like heavy hail. By a miracle I escaped being hit.

I crawled out feeling rather shaken.

I asked some A/A gunners if they knew where Corps or G.H.Q. or Division were to be found. They knew nothing.

I wandered about for a bit, looking for a familiar face.

There appears to be an air-raid here every ten minutes.

There's a big church which hasn't been hit. The priests were coming in and out of it, on their ordinary business, with a strange and inspiring calm.

After about an hour I thought I'd better get back to my section.

I found that Child had made friends with some cottagers, who were grinding and cooking our coffee for us. The whole section was sitting in the cottage kitchen chattering away happily. There's something

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terribly unreal about modern war. Why, when there are so many points of similarity between ordinary folk of all nations, should it be necessary to aggravate their few antagonisms? There's not a cottage in the whole wide world in which we couldn't sit down quite happily and chatter about the weather and the crops.

Division still haven't turned up.

After breakfast I went again into Dunkirk. And this time I had better luck. I found the Town Major's office. It was in a state of pandemonium, crowded with officers and men, all, like me, wanting information. The Town Major couldn't help much. He seemed a harassed man. An enormous and unexpected responsibility had suddenly descended on him. He could do nothing but tell us to wait or go away and report in again later.

Meanwhile the bombs were dropping thick and fast.

It was obvious that something had gone seriously wrong.

I tried to puzzle things out. Everyone was asking about ships. But the harbour's been destroyed. And nothing can get in. I tried to find out whether or not the B.E.F. is being evacuated. Nobody quite knew. There was a lot of chat about making a stand along the Calais-Ostend line with the sea at our backs.

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R.A.S.C. men were still enquiring about supplies and ammunition.

Eventually a rather reliable-looking sapper officer said to me:

'You'll be lucky if you see your Division again. The B.E.F.'s getting out. How, God knows. The Boche is at Calais and at Ostend. This is the only port we've got left. And he's bombing it to bits. If I were you, I'd destroy all my stuff and make for the harbour. There's a chance in a million that a ship may be able to get in tonight.'

This news was a bit of a shock. But at least it gave me something to start on. I drove back again to Furnes immediately.

Events must have moved pretty fast. I wonder how much Division or, for that matter, Geoffrey Cass, whom I saw only yesterday, know about these developments. It's true to say that, when we left Linselles last night, not one of our party had the faintest inkling that the campaign was over. We just thought we were being pushed off to temporary safety.

The section was stupefied.

We set about the systematic destruction of our trucks, bicycles and personal possessions. We broke up and fired shots into the cipher truck. We burnt all the records in the 'G' truck and the 'A and Q' truck. We threw away our clothes. The local inhabitants and the Belgian soldiery hung around us like vultures and eagerly seized everything we didn't want.

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The Belgian soldiery, being armed with rifles and bayonets, had a distinct advantage over the civilians.

A small boy wept when he saw the cipher machines going west. We comforted him by explaining that they weren't radios.

Baird sighed to see his beautiful new 500 Triumph plunge into a canal.

We kept enough transport to get us to within a mile or two of Dunkirk. Then we finally destroyed everything except one car, which I kept in case of emergency.

All along the road our troops were having an orgy of smashing up. Under a clear blue sky, on a quiet country road, it was perhaps the most astonishing sight of all this queer War.

We found that the situation in Dunkirk had deteriorated. The town was blazing merrily. There were huge columns of flame and smoke coming from the docks. We could no longer get near the Town Major's office.

We did a crawl round the air-raid shelters, most of which had troops in them. White has a tiresome habit of saying: 'Steady, boys, steady there, steady, steady, steady . . .' whenever a whistling bomb is heard. I feel that that's just how the Germans would like us to react.

I was surprised at the number of residents still

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unevacuated from Dunkirk. There's no water or light and very little food left. But they won't budge.

We spent half an hour sheltering from an ammunition truck which suddenly caught fire and started to blow off in all directions.

The Germans must be pretty pleased with themselves. Their campaign has been a brilliant success. Their speed of movement and their supply system are particularly remarkable. I still don't quite understand how they've been able to surround us. The battle of Cambrai must have been a flop. And the French Army can't be quite as wonderful as we'd thought.

My F.S.P. have buried themselves in the solidest-looking shelters. They have instructions to make a dash for any ship they see. They'll have to use their wits for a change.

I took Baird and Green and went to see if we couldn't find some place more comfortable than Dunkirk.

We tried St. Louis, which was cluttered up with Ordnance trucks, and Malo-les-Bains, which a morose French Marine informed me gets bombed ferociously every night. Eventually we made for the sand-dunes.

It was now getting dark.

I felt quite exhausted. I had no sleep last night and have had nothing to eat all day. And I seem to have been rushing about madly for hours.

The sand-dunes looked peaceful.

I met a signaller, who told me that there was a rumour that the Navy might be sending off boats

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tonight to take us off the beaches. It was only a rumour. But it gave us fresh hope. I sent off everyone in sight to tell stragglers to come down to the dunes. Even though the Navy may not turn up, the men will at least be out of danger here. It's suicide to stay in Dunkirk.

A little farther up I found that I'd just missed Geoffrey Cass and the Corps Staff by about an hour. They'd been taken off by a destroyer.

May 28th

I SPENT all night on the beach. Baird and Green got lost fairly early on in the dark. I don't think it mattered. In fact, we were probably of more use split up.

All night men came trickling down to the dunes. I found myself in command of my bit of the beach. It was a little difficult to keep control—especially as the men were strange to me. But they were all extraordinarily patient and sensible. They allowed themselves to be divided up into groups of about twenty-five and tucked themselves quite happily away in the sand. I don't think the Germans spotted us, although they put up flares which illuminated the whole landscape with a hard white light. The men pretended to be shadows. And I thanked God for my white mackintosh.

German engines droned continuously overhead. We heard the muffled sound of bombs dropping in the distance on Dunkirk. The glow from the burning town could be seen for miles.

During the night the Navy sent off its little boats. The sea was like glass. It was terribly exciting to hear sailors' voices and the splash of oars. Again and again the boats came in. And we duly loaded them up.

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It was queer to be loading up strange soldiers into strange boats and handing them over to strange sailors. Even the sergeants who worked with me were strange. We shared water-bottles and biscuits and chocolate. And we saved each other's lives. But we never saw each other's faces.

The French got very worried by all this secret activity. There were a lot of them about. And they kept on coming down in the middle of our embarkations and asking to see our papers. I don't know whether they thought we were a German army landing. I was glad of my Field Security Police pass. It had a magical effect, as indeed all passes—false or genuine—always do have on all French officials.

With the dawn the Navy disappeared as mysteriously as it had come. There were a lot of men still left. They settled down patiently and dug little graves for themselves in the sand. I had a sinking of the heart. There seemed very little chance that the German Air Force would let the Navy come back or that any more of us would get away from the beaches. I found myself wondering what the reaction in England must be. There are over half a million French and British troops involved in this disaster. I supposed that Churchill might have to ask for an armistice in order to save the B.E.F. from annihilation. It was an ugly thought.

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The men who got off last night were spared an unpleasant day. We were bombed and machine-gunned desultorily from daybreak onwards.

I walked along the beach looking for Baird and Green, but couldn't find them. They must have got off in the night.

I drove once more into Dunkirk. It was covered in thick black smoke, which must make it practically invisible from the air. I had to leave the car at the entrance to the town. Tangled wires and dead horses and blazing masonry made it impossible to move about except on foot, and then only with difficulty.

Last night must have been appalling. The Germans have got the range with their artillery and have been shelling the docks. In spite of the shelling and the bombing, however, I'm told that the Navy achieved the impossible and took off a number of troops from the one remaining jetty during the night. I only hope that such of my men as I couldn't get in touch with yesterday were among them. I spent a couple of hours looking for them. But I had no luck. So eventually I went back to my beach.

I'm horrified at the mass of troops still in Dunkirk or just marching into the town. I don't know who's responsible. But I should have thought they ought all to be diverted at once onto the beaches.

On the other hand, everyone was much more optimistic than I'd expected. There have been comparatively few casualties. The whole B.E.F. has a blind faith in the Navy.

MY FIRST WAR

It was pretty hot on the beaches. The Germans never left us alone for a moment. Fortunately stray men, dispersed and buried in sand, don't make very satisfactory bomb-targets. So the aeroplanes had only a moderate success.

At midday, to avoid congestion, we moved up to Bray-Dunes.

It was there that we saw a Messerschmitt shot down by A/A fire. It sank like a stone into the sea and blew up. We all cheered. I'm glad to think that A/A fire is occasionally effective. As a rule A/A gunners, ignoring the elementary rules of pheasant-shooting, appear to aim with religious precision at the enemy's tail and miss him by half a mile.

The sea was still dead calm. Some of the men celebrated the destruction of the Messerschmitt by taking off their clothes and plunging into the water. For a moment the beach looked as if it was going to develop a Bank-holiday atmosphere. But machine-gun fire soon forced everyone back under cover.

I saw Reggie Parminter for a second. He's an old friend, a Brigadier now and a Q.M.G. It was a joy to see a familiar face. It was also a relief to know that there are senior officers in the offing.

At 4 the Navy turned up again. And the embarkations started once more. This time the German Air Force definitely began to pay us more attention. Wave after wave of bombers came over. And it became necessary to keep everyone off the beach except the actual party being embarked.

MY FIRST WAR

The Navy's A/A guns were in action intermittently all day.

We didn't see any British fighters. But as the German attacks eventually slackened off, I imagine that our people were functioning somewhere out of sight.

This whole withdrawal is presumably a colossal improvisation.

The loading took a long long time. The destroyers had only two boats apiece. And these had to be rowed back and forth about half a mile with a load of a dozen men. It took six or eight hours to fill the destroyers to capacity. It must have been fidgety work for the sailors, whose whole strength is in their speed and mobility. But they carried on without a murmur. The two destroyers facing our beach took off about 1,500 men between them.

In the evening a walking-wounded British corporal came out of the hospital on the dunes and asked if we could evacuate the wounded. I hadn't realised that there were men of ours in the hospital. But it appeared that there were about 150. We took off as many as could move themselves. The rest will have to take their chance. I went over the hospital with the corporal. It's a vast place, very clean and well run. It was quite full of casualties. The doctors and the Sisters of Mercy were carrying on patiently just as if nothing was happening round them. God knows how they're getting supplies.

Later I went on board one of our destroyers myself. A Maltese steward gave me sausage-sandwiches

MY FIRST WAR

and whisky. He took away my shoes and socks and trousers to dry. And I began to feel a human being again.

I wonder what has happened to Division. It seems terrible to be abandoning them like this. My part in this fight has been rather ridiculous. There have been no horrors, no real danger, no desperate hand-to-hand fighting. I've never for a moment stopped thinking of myself as a civilian somehow mixed up with the Army.

I went to sleep in a chair in front of the fire in the Captain's cabin.

May 29th

AT 3 this morning there was a terrific explosion as a torpedo hit the destroyer. I suppose the force of it must have knocked me unconscious. First thing I knew I was stumbling about in the dark trying to find the door of the cabin. The whole ship was trembling violently. The furniture appeared to be dancing about. There was a strong smell of petrol. I heard someone scuffling in a corner and just had the good sense to shout:

'For God's sake don't light a match.'

With the greatest of difficulty I found the door and managed to get it open.

Finding my way out on deck was a bit of a nightmare. Everything was pitch-black. A lot of men had been sleeping in the passage, and their possessions were strewn all over the place. And fuel-oil and water poured onto my head fit to drown me.

It didn't occur to me for a moment that any of us had a chance of escape. The sailors last night had been emphatic that a torpedo meant the end of everything. But somehow it didn't seem to matter much. The disaster hadn't reached my diaphragm. It was still trying to penetrate the outer layer of my brain. I remembered similar situations in American films. Gary Cooper always finds a way out. But then he's a

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valuable star, and the management can't afford to have him killed so early in the picture.

I pushed my way out on deck.

Someone said:

'Keep down. They're machine-gunning us.'

I huddled against a steel door and watched the fight. Two dark shapes in the middle distance turned out to be German M.T.B.s. The destroyer and another British warship were giving them hell with shells and tracer-bullets. The M.T.B.s were answering with machine-gun fire. But one by one they were hit. We saw them leap into the air and then settle down into the water and sink. Everyone sighed with relief.

The firing stopped eventually. I crept out and felt myself all over to see what bits of me were missing. I found that two of my front teeth were broken in half. A third was hanging by a thread. A fourth had had a piece knocked off it. Otherwise I was intact.

The deck was a mass of twisted steel and mangled bodies. The Captain had been machine-gunned and killed on the bridge. The destroyer had stopped two torpedoes. She'd been hit while hanging about to pick up survivors from another ship, which had been sunk a few minutes before.

She was a very gruesome sight.

It was only by some miracle that she was still floating. She started sending out S.O.S.s. A warship came alongside out of the darkness. The Captain of the warship and our Second Officer shouted at each other for a while. Then the warship drew away again.

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The Second Officer spoke to us. He said that our engines had been disabled and that we couldn't move. But we weren't going to sink. And with any luck we'd be towed to port. I thought of the German Air Force and wondered if we had a hope in hell. But the Second Officer's voice was soothing. And all the men cheered.

The 'tubes' were released to give us less weight.

It began to be very cold. I found myself shivering. I was wearing only a battle-dress top and pyjama trousers. Also I'd been concussed. I thought I'd go back to the cabin and get some more clothes. But a muffled explosion below deck prevented me.

Wounded men began to be brought up from the bowels of the ship. I learned that one of the torpedoes had gone right through the Ward Room, killing all thirty-five of our officers who were sleeping there.

It's pure chance that I'm alive. If I'd gone on board a little earlier I should have been put in the Ward Room. I only slept in the Captain's cabin because there was no room for me anywhere else.

There's some consolation now in last night's anonymity. I shall never know who the officers were who were killed.

The destroyer continued to float. After half an hour she took a list. We moved the men about on deck so as to distribute their weight as evenly as possible.

Just before dawn a ship loomed up out of nowhere. She'd been trying all night to get into Dunkirk, but

MY FIRST WAR

without success. She'd been whistled up to our help by the warship.

It was an immense relief to see her.

There remained only one job to be done. We had to transfer our cargo. The men showed wonderful discipline. There was no ugly rush. They allowed themselves to be divided into groups and transferred from one ship to another with the same patience that they had shown on Bray-Dunes beach. It must have been a great temptation to get out of turn and take a flying leap for safety. But no one did.

There are two kinds of discipline. There's German discipline, based on habit, routine and fear. And there's our own, which is based on good sense and the realisation that the orders given are probably sound.

We were only four officers: two Majors, the C.O.M.E. of Corps, with a bullet in his heel, and myself.

The sailors didn't come with us. They rowed off in a little boat to a cruiser which was standing by and went back to Dunkirk to do more evacuation.

The cruiser put two shells into our destroyer.

We watched her sink, carrying with her her load of unknown dead.

The rest of the journey was uneventful. It took us ten hours to reach Dover. I have exposed nerves in

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three of my front teeth. They hurt a good deal. And I can't eat or drink anything.

It's sad to think that I got wounded only while running away.

I'm told that the torpedo passed fifteen feet away from me.

Dover harbour was full of little ships. I can't understand why the Germans aren't bombing it. Presumably they're saving their full fury for the fighting battalions which are coming after us. This shipload is mainly women and children, so to speak. The bulk of us are signallers and sappers and ordnance men and clerks.

I went on shore in Dover and set off in search of clothes. I met an R.A.M.C. Major. He looked at me curiously. There was fuel-oil in my hair and blood all over my face. He took me by the arm, put me in a hospital train and sent me to Durham.

England is just as it's always been. What a queer mood Stevenson must have been in when he wrote:

'To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive.'

It's just plain nonsense.

May 30th

AND so the saga ends.
The hospital train was a magnificent affair. It was almost worth being wounded to be allowed to travel in it.

I shared a compartment with some mildly wounded officers. One of them, a very young 2nd Lieutenant, was convinced that he was the only surviving officer of the Sherwood Foresters. He talked—on and on—excitedly—like a character out of *Journey's End*.

The rest of us slept.

At the first train-stop a pretty nurse put her head in at the window and offered us tea and sandwiches. A Black Watch officer, who'd had a pretty bad time, woke out of a deep sleep and shouted:

'I've got to take up a defensive position.'

The nurse retired, looking scared. It will be weeks before any of these men get the war out of their subconscious minds.

The hospital is a hastily converted lunatic asylum. We sleep in a long cool room which looks out on a garden. It is almost frighteningly quiet. Occasionally a Diesel-engined lorry drones up the hill outside, making a noise like a German bomber.

In the next bed is John Cowdray, who's lost an arm. He's had harrowing adventures. I remember see-

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ing his ambulance in a line of ambulances just outside Dunkirk. I didn't know he was in it. A bomb dropped so close to him there that it blew open the door and wounded the men inside all over again.

On the other side of me is a middle-aged Belgian officer suffering from *éclats*, which, I believe are spent machine-gun bullets, in the back.

Everyone here treats us like heroes.

I got up in the middle of the night and slipped out into the garden to look for my men, and was hauled back to bed by the night-nurses.

May 31st

MARY has come. And tomorrow I am going home. There's too much wrong with me. I'm going back to London to be treated by my own doctors for concussion and fractured teeth and a fractured jaw.

I seem to have lost about a stone in weight.

The newspapers are full of the story of the evacuation from Dunkirk, of its discipline, of its wonderful organisation. Well, it didn't seem particularly well organised to me. Perhaps it's got better since I left. The important thing is that men are still being taken off.

There's something almost miraculous in the British powers of improvisation.

I suppose that, in history, this campaign will count as a first-class military defeat. But it wasn't.

BRIEF EXPLANATION OF MILITARY ABBREVIATIONS FOUND
IN THIS BOOK

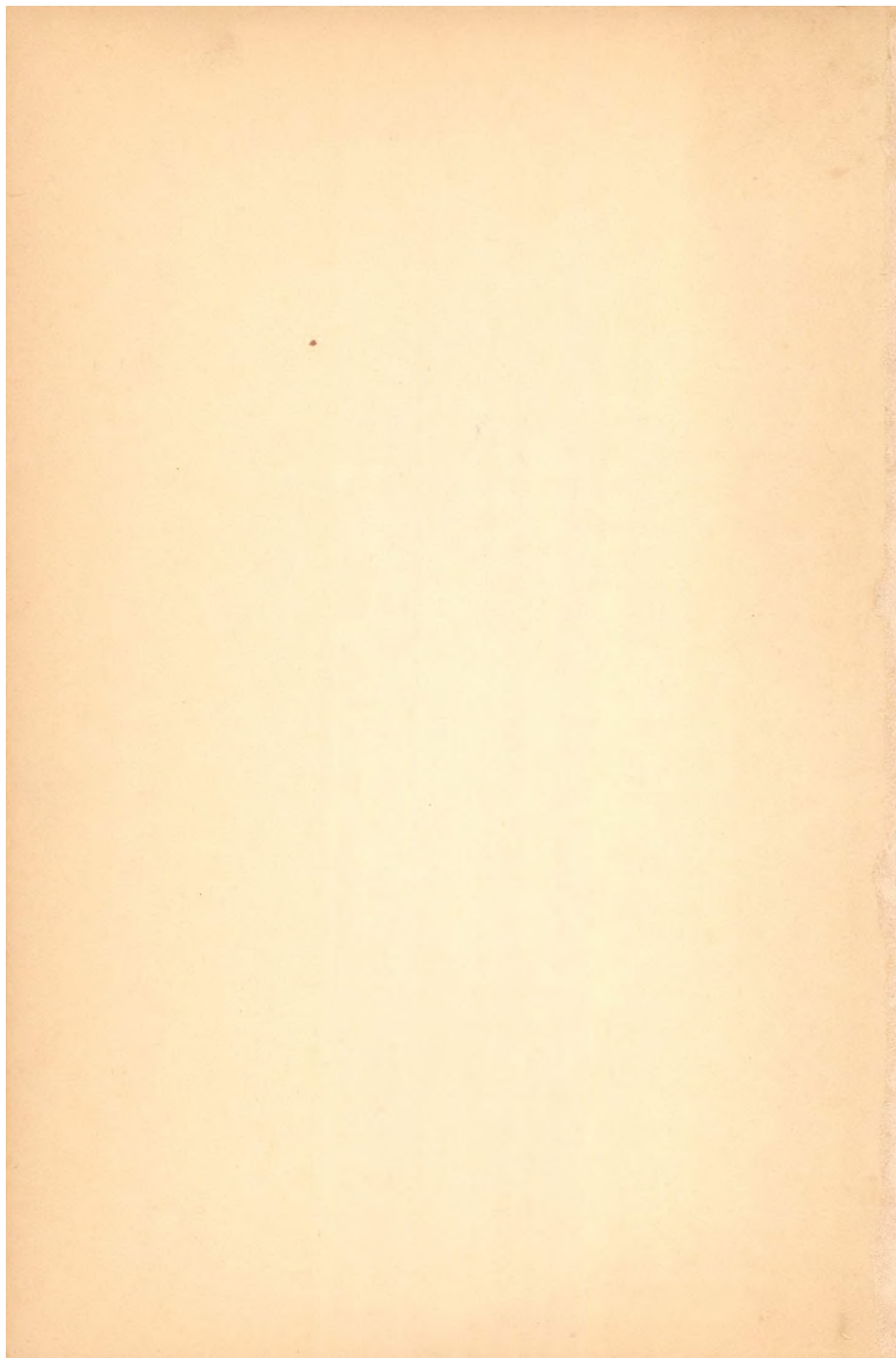
'A'	'A' is the Adjutant-General's branch of the General Staff
'A and Q'	'Q' is the Quartermaster-General's branch of the General Staff
A/A	Anti-Aircraft
A.D.M.S.	Assistant Director Medical Services
A.R.P.	Air-Raids Precautions
A/T	Anti-Tank
'B' Mess	Headquarter's Second Mess
B.E.F.	British Expeditionary Force
C.O.	Commanding Officer
C.O.M.E.	Chief Ordnance Mechanical Engineer
C.R.A.S.C.	Commanding (Officer) Royal Army Service Corps
C.S.M.	Company Sergeant Major
Cipher Officer	Officer who ciphers and deciphers mes- sages
Corps 'G' Office	General Staff Office of an Army Corps
D.A.A.G.	Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General
D.A.Q.M.G.	Deputy Assistant Quartermaster-Gen- eral
D.M.I.	Director of Military Intelligence
ENSA	Entertainment National Service Asso- ciation
F.S.P.	Field Security Police
'G'	General Staff
G2	Second General Staff

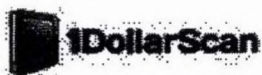
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G.H.Q.	General Headquarters
red J	Stamp on passport, indicating Jew
black J	Stamp on passport, indicating Jew
L. of C.	Lines of Communication
M.I.	Military Intelligence
M.T.B.	Motor Torpedo Boat
N.C.O.	Non-Commissioned Officer
N.A.A.F.I.	Navy, Army, Air-Force Institute
Q.M.G.	Quartermaster-General
R.A.F.	Royal Air Force
R.A.M.C.	Royal Army Medical Corps
R.A.S.C.	Royal Army Service Corps
R.E.	Royal Engineers



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